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Faith Was His Fortune: The Life Story of George Pepperdine

Bill Youngs

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FAITH WAS HIS FORTUNE

The Life Story of GEORGE PEPPERDINE

BILL YOUNGS

FAITH WAS HIS FORTUNE

The Life Story of GEORGE PEPPERDINE

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Geo. Pepperdine

Original oil portrait by
JOHN TERRY WEHR

January 20, 1976

Dear John,

I stood a long, long time looking at your marvelous portrait of Mr. Pepperdine. It is so like him with such character, such kindness in his face.

He was such a loving and gentle man with all of his tremendous capabilities and resources. He remained a very humble and dedicated Christian throughout his life. You have captured this in your beautiful portrait.

We want the thousands of students who will pass through the halls of Pepperdine University to know about him and appreciate the heritage he has left them. Your portrait will help in this.

May 1976 be a year of blessing for you.

Cordially,

Helen M. Young

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

So many people, who knew George Pepperdine better than this biographer, helped put this book together that it would be difficult to name them all. But several, some of whose names do not appear in the text, contributed so much that without their help the story could not have been told.

First of all, much of the vital basic research was done by the original biographers of Faith is My Fortune, which was published shortly before Mr. Pepperdine's death in 1962. These men were Dr. Richard L. Clark and Dr. Jack W. Bates. They were assisted by the late Dr. Wade Ruby, who had been minister of the church Mr. Pepperdine attended for many years and headed the English Department at Pepperdine College for more than two decades.

Among many this writer interviewed were Don Miller, Norvel and Helen Young, James L. Lovell, Martin Christensen, Walter King, Kenneth Hahn, the late Harry Robert Fox, Sr. and Kenneth Davidson. There were many other alumni and faculty and staff people who knew Mr. Pepperdine who confirmed much of the feeling about him expressed by the others.

Most valuable contribution of all, of course, came from Helen Pepperdine, who knew him and loved him best of all.

—Bill Youngs

To Helen Pepperdine

". . . and others fell upon the good ground, and yielded fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty." (Matt. 13:8)

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FOREWORD

On the rugged slopes of the Santa Monica Mountains overlooking the Pacific Ocean in Malibu, California, stands a remarkable cluster of academic buildings named for a man who never saw them.

In the heart of Heidelberg, Germany, an imposing old building houses another branch of the educational institution which bears his name and that of the late J. C. Moore, who was responsible for acquiring the property for the school. "Moorehaus," too, has come since his time on earth.

Likewise, he never knew the School of Law in Anaheim, California, nor the many continuing education centers in the West which bear his name.

But George Pepperdine planted the seed.

And the parent stock of Pepperdine University still stands where it germinated and began to grow in Los Angeles nearly four decades ago.

George Pepperdine, as a boy on a farm in Kansas, learned the principle of the seed. He saw his father select from the harvest in the fall the seed corn — the best of the crop — for planting the following spring.

When he planted Pepperdine College in Los Angeles, his good ground had at bedrock the same Christian principle which guided George Pepperdine throughout his life. He believed in education, obviously, but he also believed that education without the spiritual dimension neglected the most important part of man's nature.

So the soil was rich where the seed of Christian education was sown.

George Pepperdine lived for twenty-five years to see it grow and to help tend it. He believed that what he started would continue to grow after he was gone. He once expressed it this way to the alumni in an article: "On many occasions I have said to groups of students that I am count-

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ing on them after they graduate from Pepperdine College to multiply my work in the world. I can live only one life. I can contact only a few people. I can influence only a small number. I can do only a limited amount of good work . . . Therefore, I am counting on you, the Alumni, to live long after I am gone and to continue the ever increasing waves of good citizenship and Christian influence embodied in the ideals of our college."

And, of course, this multiplying effect has extended even beyond the ranks of the alumni. When Mr. Pepperdine had given all that he had financially to the college, others rallied to extend the influence. When he died, other men and women of vision arose to tend the academic vineyard.

The campus in Malibu, the Law School in Orange County, the Heidelberg campus, the vital urban college still functioning in Los Angeles are all the outgrowth of the seed George Pepperdine planted in good ground, the hearts of Christian people.

PROLOGUE

Helen Pepperdine arose very early that mid-summer morning and the first thing she did was what she had been doing first thing every morning for the past year. She went into the adjoining room and listened quietly for a moment to the breathing of the man on the hospital bed. He looked so frail . . . so helpless!

George Pepperdine lay partially on his left side, his thin left thigh and bony knee out from under the sheet. Gently, she patted the knee and pulled the sheet back over his leg. She sighed and returned to getting dressed for another day of tending the man she loved.

At 7:30 a.m. Walter King answered the telephone in his home in Inglewood.

"This is Helen Pepperdine," the voice said. "Could you come by and help me turn George and change the sheets?"

"Sure," Walter said, without question, though wondering why this woman of such physical and spiritual strength needed him for that purpose at this hour.

High in the air over the Atlantic Ocean an airplane winged its way toward America from Switzerland. One of the passengers was Wendell Pepperdine, a student in the college founded by his father, who had been traveling with a Pepperdine summer program in Europe.

In the kitchen of the president's home on campus, Helen Young ate breakfast with her husband, Norvel.

"And you have the Board of Trustees meeting at three o'clock at the Pepperdine's home," she reminded him.

Marilyn Pepperdine Janowitz awoke early, too, still not adjusted to the recent time change between her home in New York and the home of her parents here in Los Angeles. She got up to see what she could do to help in what promised to be a busy day in this household.

As he got ready for class in his apartment near the campus of the University of Southern California, George Pepperdine II thought about the wonderful visit he'd had with his father on the afternoon before.

In Pasadena, Don Miller wondered if he could possibly get through all his appointments at the bank and still make it to the Pepperdine Board of Trustees meeting in time to preside as chairman. Somehow, he knew he would — after all, he had managed to be at these meetings for the last quarter of a century.

It was about 8 o'clock when Walter King arrived at the Pepperdine home on Wellington Road. He and Mrs. Pepperdine changed the sheets.

In New York the plane landed at the airport and Wendell Pepperdine headed wearily toward the terminal to catch his flight to Los Angeles.

Norvel Young went through the private entrance leading up the stairway to "The Tower," administrative offices for Pepperdine College at 81st and Vermont. Too much on his schedule today to afford the luxury of going through the main part of the building — a trip which always required numerous visits along the way with staff people with problems to discuss or just wanting to make friendly conversation with this easy-to-talk-to college president.

Frances Walters, administrative assistant, greeted Dr. Young with the usual stack of messages, checks to sign, appointments to keep, decisions to make, a report to finish writing for the board meeting. He was especially excited about this study on the possibility of instituting the tri-mester system for the college and also the faculty investigation about starting a Year-In-Europe program.

In his office on the campus proper at 1121 West 79th Street, Dean J. P. Sanders jotted down notes for his report to the Board on personnel. Among other things, he was to report that the brilliant young assistant to the president,

William S. Banowsky, was being named associate dean of students.

At 9 o'clock, Walter King, director of offstreet parking for the City of Los Angeles, called his secretary and told her he wouldn't be in until after lunch time unless something urgent required his presence at City Hall.

Helen Pepperdine busied herself around the big house getting things ready for the Trustees' meeting.

About ten o'clock, George Pepperdine roused. His eyes were clear. He smiled his recognition of Walter King and Marilyn, who were at the foot of his bed. His face, which had been drawn as he slept, looked relaxed now.

Mrs. Pepperdine came upstairs just as he awoke and bent to kiss the lined cheek.

"You surely sleep late!" she chided.

She went about the role of ministering to a sick husband's needs upon awakening.

"You know," George Pepperdine told Marilyn and Walter King as his wife went to the bathroom to return a cloth she had used to wash his face, "I believe I'm hungry. I think I'd like some breakfast."

That was a switch! Helen went quickly downstairs to prepare his breakfast while he was in that frame of mind.

While she was gone, George Pepperdine talked eagerly, lucidly, to his daughter and Walter King, remembering highlights of the early days of the college when Walter was a student there and after World War II when Walter came to work for several years as business manager of his Alma Mater.

George's eyes brightened as Helen came up with the tray of breakfast — milk, eggs, toast and apricot halves. He ate with obvious enjoyment.

Then they talked some more. Helen kept stopping by the bed frequently to enter into the conversation and to do comforting things for her husband. Walter, impressed

with the marked improvement in the patient, called his office again and said he might be there after a while.

The board meeting was scheduled for three o'clock.

At one o'clock George Pepperdine began to get drowsy. Walter King was on one side of the bed; Marilyn on the other. Helen went to the bedroom door to speak to a neighbor. Walter and Marilyn were massaging the lower part of his legs, which were hurting.

Mr. Pepperdine smiled as his eyes opened and he saw what Walter was doing.

"Walter," he said, "that side is already dead. Would you rub the other side?"

The long-time friend and the daughter gently rubbed the wasted limbs which were bothering him. George Pepperdine dozed and roused, dozed and roused again. Walter and Marilyn talked quietly and George frequently joined in the conversation.

"Are they bothering you, sweetheart?" Helen said at one point. "Make them talk loud enough for you to hear what they're saying."

"I can hear," he said. "It's all right."

His eyes closed and his even breathing told them he was sleeping peacefully. Helen went downstairs to finish in the dining room for the Board meeting. Walter and Marilyn gently rubbed George Pepperdine's left leg and talked together.

The doorbell rang and Mrs. Pepperdine went to the front door. It was a neighbor who came to inquire about Mr. Pepperdine.

Suddenly, under Walter King's hand, he sensed a change. There had been no warning, no gasp, no sigh. But the old body was still, and Marilyn knew, too, her father had ever so quietly left them.

"Helen!"

Mrs. Pepperdine had just closed the front door when

she heard Walter call her name. He never addressed her as Helen and she knew the reason he did now. She knew he had said it for George. She mounted the stairway — knowing with a heavy heart that the doctor's prediction a few days earlier had come to pass.

What happened after George Pepperdine peacefully went to sleep for the last time was an amazing exercise in courage which could only have been carried out by a woman of tremendous strength and will.

Helen Pepperdine notified the physician and the funeral home, which had already been alerted two weeks earlier that the end was near and had made all arrangements. She requested that the body not be removed until later. She comforted her daughter, whose own strength quickly asserted itself and she became calm and helpful. She stationed Walter King at the front entrance to the house to greet the Board members and usher them into the dining room.

Clarence (Tuck) Shattuck was the first trustee to arrive. He made a beeline for the stairs, as usual, to speak to his old friend in the hospital bed. Helen stopped him and said, "Not now!"

By the time the meeting convened, Helen Pepperdine was in her seat — outwardly calm, inwardly numbed from the shock of her loss.

The airplane droned over the Rockies, still two hours out of Los Angeles International Airport, where George II was planning to meet his brother, Wendell.

Don Miller called the meeting to order. Helen gripped the arms of her chair — desperately wanting to share the burden of her heart with fellow board members. But she knew George Pepperdine wouldn't want to be the cause of interfering with a meeting concerned with the welfare of the institution which had been his life for twenty-five years. So she resisted the compelling urge.

An hour passed — dragged — for Helen Pepperdine. What was discussed she cannot recall. Another hour went by, almost interminably, and the pressure was mounting for her.

Shortly before 5:30, Mrs. Pepperdine glanced up and her eyes sought those of Frances Walters, the secretary, who was seated just outside the circle of trustees around the table.

Mrs. Pepperdine could read Frances' lips: "How is he?" And Frances suddenly knew as Mrs. Pepperdine's head shook in silent grief.

She could contain it no longer. "Don," Helen said to the Board chairman, "please finish it up as soon as you can."

All eyes turned to her.

"George left us at 1:30 this afternoon," she announced, her voice quiet, controlled, relieved now of the burden she had borne alone in the big room so long.

The date was July 31, 1962.

CHAPTER ONE

Name Enough for Anyone

Farmer John Pepperdine was in a rare quandary. Out there in the fields under the hot June sun was work to be done — work he was eager to finish — yet here he stood like a clumsy ox while crab grass and weeds choked the life out of his corn crop.

John sighed and turned his eyes from the growing, misused stalks of corn to the small one-room stone cabin. In there was the cause of his dilemma. The drama in the cabin kept him from the cornfield, yet its outcome meant more to him than all the corn in Kansas.

The corn would have to wait. Inside the cabin, Mary was getting ready to present him with their second child. Like fathers everywhere in such situations, he paced the floor — or in his particular case, the yard of their modest home on the Kansas prairie.

He, John, might as well be hoeing corn, he thought ruefully, for all the good he could do for the miracle taking place in the little house. Mary, he knew, was in capable hands, with the midwife, old Mrs. McGraw, and a neighbor, Mrs. Bowman, completely in charge. Those two not only had made it very plain that his help was not needed at this moment, but would regard his presence in the cabin as completely unnecessary and entirely unseemly.

John looked again longingly at the crop of corn. He actually yearned to get out there and hoe until his shoulders and arms and back ached and his shirt was wet with sweat. And this longing was not entirely born of the need to be doing something constructive while his wife was in labor. On the contrary, John — young and strong — loved the demands of the farm — the rugged labor required to wrest a living from this land on the Western frontier.

Finally, John rubbed his work-roughened hand over his brow and moved toward the door of the cabin — not to go in but to listen. Just outside the doorway, he could hear the suppressed murmur of women's voices.

How much longer? Was it like this the first time? Had she cried out in pain? He couldn't remember at the moment. Then he heard Mrs. McGraw laugh and that eased his mind a great deal. She must be doing all right if the midwife could find something to laugh about.

Relieved, he decided to water the chickens. He puttered with that, trying to stretch out the chore, but it really took only a short while. He wondered what else he could do that close by to kill a little more time. Wondering what to do on that farm was a sensation totally foreign to John Pepperdine! He looked at Mary's flower garden, which surrounded the house. No weeds there to pull; she'd kept it neat as a pin right up to a day or two ago. Well . . . let's see . . .

The door to the cabin opened. John's head jerked toward it at the sound, his breath catching, his heart pounding.

"Mr. Pepperdine," his neighbor said, "it's all over. You may come in now."

Mrs. Bowman was smiling as she said it. John Pepperdine returned a shaky, self-conscious grin and entered the cabin.

In the dimness he was unable to see momentarily and

paused in the middle of the room. Then he moved toward the bed and looked anxiously down at his wife. Able to see now, he noticed she was pale, her face wet with perspiration. But her smile undid the knot in his stomach.

Then, as he drew aside the cover, he was able to look with the beginning of that unparalleled feeling of new fatherhood at the husky baby beside her.

"It's another boy, John," Mary whispered.

The man smiled. He kneeled and stroked her face tenderly, awkwardly.

"Never mind," he said.

He said it almost apologetically, knowing she had wanted a little sister for young Fred.

"I don't mind," she said and John knew she really meant it.

He was feeling good now. "This fellow will help me in the fields," he said, half-jokingly, half-boastfully.

"You sound just like my old man," Mrs. McGraw, her chubby face in smiles at the scene, put in gruffly. "Anyway, you're right, this one's strong — he'll be a good hand some day in the corn."

John, his worry over his wife's condition eased, looked with interest at the newborn babe.

"What will we name him?" he said. "We'd had our minds set on a girl and haven't even got a name for this little shaver."

Mary smiled at her husband. "I named our first-born," she reminded. "You should name this one."

For a father who had been expecting the baby to be a girl, John Pepperdine was not long coming to a decision.

"Then I'd like to call him George," he said, "after my brother."

"George what?" Mary asked.

"Just George — George Pepperdine — that's name enough for anyone!"

Mary Pepperdine nodded, satisfied, and snuggled closer to the sleeping child to close her eyes for some much needed sleep of her own.

John and the two women tiptoed from the bedside.

The date was June 20, 1886.

CHAPTER TWO

"Wild and Woolly" Kansas

The life of George Pepperdine began soon after the turbulent period of strife and blood-shed in "bleeding Kansas." From the days of '49 and earlier there had been many covered wagons on the trails across Kansas.

There was the old Santa Fe Trail running southwest to New Mexico and other trails farther north going to Colorado, Utah and to the northern California gold fields. The Oregon Trail ran across part of Kansas, then north into Nebraska and on westward.

Thousands of square miles of excellent prairie grazing land and good soil for cultivation along the streams of Kansas were overlooked and passed by in the mad rush toward supposedly greener pastures and easier fortunes farther west. Therefore, the settlers in Kansas were not very numerous until a decade or two after the Civil War. Kansas became a state in 1861.

Just before the Civil War, there were a few thousand towns-people and homesteaders along the eastern border, near Missouri, which was a slave state. Kansas was trying, against great odds, to establish a free state. In November of 1854, when Kansas held its first Territorial election to select a delegate to the U.S. Congress, some 1700 armed

Missourians and slave traders marched into the principal towns along the east end of Kansas where most of the population was concentrated. They stuffed the ballot boxes with pro-slavery votes in an effort to force the election of a pro-slavery delegate. Mobs became active with their "tar and feathers." Pro-slavers offered prizes to anyone who would bring in the scalp of a free-state advocate.

This activity brought bitter enmity against the Missourians and slave traders. The result was many fights, raids, lynchings, hangings and murders along the border. Much bloodshed also was caused by the Indians, from whom the ranchers were in constant danger until the final settlement between the U.S. Government and the Indian Tribes in 1878, when they were moved to Indian Reservations. In one raid the Cheyennes, under Chief "Dull Knife," killed about forty Kansas settlers and burned many ranch homes.

Only four years before George was born, Jesse James, living over the border in Missouri, was killed and his outlaw gang dispersed. The Bender Brothers murder gang of Kansas had its headquarters in the same county where the Pepperdine claim was located. This gang was also wiped out a little before George's time, but, as a boy, he heard many hair-raising tales of murder still being told. The Bender method of operation was to become friendly with small parties of immigrants traveling west with one or two covered wagons, invite them to camp at the Bender ranch and enjoy the shade trees and water, both of which were scarce in that part of the country. Then, at an unexpected moment, the Benders would quickly shoot all the travelers and bury them, burn their wagons, cargoes and anything else that might serve as evidence against them. They would take the money of the immigrants and sell their horses in some distant place. They thought no one would find them out, but eventually justice caught up with them.

"Buffalo Bill" Cody held a prominent place in early

Kansas history. Before he was 22 years old, he made an enviable record as a Pony Express rider on the dangerous route to California. After he finished his service in the Kansas Civil War cavalry, he ended the Cheyenne Indian war when he killed their chief, "Yellow Hand," in single combat. He gained his title of "Buffalo Bill" when he made good his contract to supply buffalo meat for employees of the Kansas Pacific while the railroad was being built across Kansas. He gave up frontier life in 1883, the same year the Pepperdine family settled in Kansas. It was then that he organized his "Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show," a spectacular extravaganza which became famous in America and Europe.

In 1872 the Santa Fe Railroad was built as far west as Dodge City, Kansas — then the heart of the buffalo hunter's paradise. At one time more than 40,000 buffalo hides were stacked up at Dodge City awaiting shipment. Within a ten-year period more than five million hides were shipped from Western Kansas. Thus it is easy to understand why the mighty herds of brave animals soon became virtually extinct, and the bones of many millions of them bleached on the plains of the West. For many years the gathering and shipping of buffalo bones was a sizable industry. Hundreds of carloads were shipped to eastern fertilizer plants. The price of bones then was about six dollars a ton. It is interesting that George Pepperdine once, as a very small boy attempted to cash in on this bone industry. He was a few years too late, but his time was yet to come in the business world.

By 1886, when George was born, the dangers and bloodshed of the frontier were past. The herds of wild buffalo had been killed or driven westward. The Indians were peaceful on their reservations. There was no more border fighting over slavery. Some parts of the state were being homesteaded and settled rapidly.

In George's childhood, there was still the atmosphere of the frontier and still some of the hardships, but the dangers were gone.

CHAPTER THREE

New Kind of American Pioneer

George Pepperdine came into the world at the exact point in time best suited to the nature of the man he was to become.

Despite his father's ambitions for his boys to follow in his own footsteps, George Pepperdine was never destined to become a farmer and never had a desire to be one.

George was born at a great transition period in America's history. The frontiers had been tamed; the industrial revolution was a lusty youngster feeling its oats and offering opportunities to the dreamer, the inventor, the creative fledgling of commerce.

George Pepperdine, of course, would have had little inkling of the industrial revolution when he was a boy. And it seems strange that he somehow knew, even as a lad in that remote rural environment, that this land didn't represent his own future. In fact, George was fully grown before he ever saw his first automobile — the vehicle which was to play such a vital role in his life.

But it was indeed a time for a new kind of American pioneer and this boy grew up ready and eager to meet the challenge of something different than he knew on the farm.

George Pepperdine came from pioneering stock. Both parents were of English descent.

The first Pepperdine to emigrate to this country was Aquila Pepperdine, born in Yorkshire about 1779. He came to America at an early age and settled in upper New York state. He loved his adopted country and became a soldier in the War of 1812, fighting for the American cause.

Aquila married a girl in upper New York state and from this union four sons were born. The oldest, Shadrack, joined the stream of gold-seekers to California in 1849. This robust adventurer survived the hardships and dangers of the rugged overland trip and the vicissitudes of the gold camps, but made no fortune in his search for the elusive golden metal. Eventually, he settled in Alturas County and lived there to a ripe old age.

The lure of the West exerted a less powerful pull upon the three younger brothers. Nevertheless, the attraction was there, for the trio journeyed to Illinois where they settled. Robert, one of the three, who was to become George Pepperdine's grandfather, located in the town of Raymond in Montgomery County and tilled the rich farmland of central Illinois. Here John Pepperdine, George's father, was born on April 9, 1853. This was only a short distance from Springfield, Illinois, where Abraham Lincoln was then an energetic young attorney at law.

George Pepperdine's mother was Mary Lain. She was born on a Kentucky farm near the present Berea College. In fact, part of the land on which the college is located once belonged to Mary Lain's uncle, Peter Foley. When Mary was twelve years old her mother died and, as the oldest of several children, the task of cooking and housekeeping fell upon her young shoulders. Although this meant foregoing her schooling, the young girl courageously took on the burden.

Following his wife's death, F. W. Lain, tired of the years of struggling to make a living from the rocky soil of his farm in Kentucky, moved to Montgomery County, Illi-

nois, about 1878. It was here that Mary, then about 21 years of age, met and fell in love with John Pepperdine.

The lure of the West also had its effect on John Pepperdine as a young man. He heard of inexpensive land and claims to be had in the West. He knew it would take him a lifetime to earn enough to buy a farm of his own in central Illinois, but if the opportunities out in Kansas were as great as rumored, he decided he would try to persuade Mary Lain to become his wife and go with him to Kansas and settle. First he decided to investigate conditions for himself.

Being a quiet young man, John made his decision on his own and journeyed westward alone without fanfare. It didn't take him long to find what he was seeking as he arrived in southeastern Kansas, six miles south of the little village of Mound Valley in La Bette County. A farmer by the name of Cotton had a claim of eighty acres which he was willing to sell at what seemed to John a bargain price. The deal was promptly concluded and the new owner of the land proudly returned to Illinois. Now he was ready for the other important part of his future plans.

John hastened to the Lain home. He enthusiastically told his sweetheart about his trip, about the land and about the purchase of the farm. He ended it with a proposal of marriage. She accepted and soon thereafter, in 1880, the wedding took place.

The move to Kansas was some two years away, although they began to carefully prepare for the journey early in their marriage. The purchase of the land had taken most of John's capital. He would need farm equipment, a team of horses, a few cattle and some household furnishings on the new farm. With quiet resolution, John applied himself to toil and saved his money. They planned to purchase the cattle and equipment after their arrival in Kansas. Mary's father gave her one of the horses they needed.

Mary, of course, did her share in all this, working and planning and saving to get ready for the move. She also gave birth to their first child. They named the boy Fred in memory of Mary's father.

Finally, early in the spring of 1883, all was ready for departure. A covered wagon, with every possible space filled by precious supplies, was the means of travel. Early one morning, with all the farewells said, John started the horses with a slap of the reins and the wagons lurched westward.

The long, rough trip to Mound Valley with baby Fred was not without its hardships, of course, but to the young couple it was also a great adventure. Mary's happy laughter and cheerful optimism quelled any uneasiness or doubts John had had before they left. Even the first sight of the crude one-room cabin, built by Mr. Cotton from loose flat rocks gathered from the hillsides and breaks in the prairie, did not dismay her.

Surveying the little structure, Mary said carefully: "So this is home, John. I can hardly wait to get settled."

"It isn't much, sweetheart, but it's our own."

"Someday we'll have better," she predicted. "Right now, it looks wonderful to me."

"Come on," he said, "I'll show you the inside."

The man jumped lightly from the wagon and then helped Mary down with baby Fred. Inside was, if anything, less appealing than the outside. But still Mary was undaunted.

Before nightfall they had the cabin cleaned and their few pieces of furniture in place. Then, by the cheerful light of a kerosene lamp, the tired and happy pair ate their supper. After the dishes were washed and little Fred put to bed in his homemade cradle, the man and woman sat for a long time on the back porch and talked of their plans for the future. The soft wind was filled with the smell of trampled grass and fresh earth. The fragrance stirred John's urge to

begin breaking the soil of the neglected fields down there below the little hill on which their cabin stood.

"I'm glad Mr. Cotton had the foresight to start these little trees around the place," Mary said. "We'll have plenty of shade within a few years. And I want to raise some flowers, too."

John chuckled as he looked at the shape of the small cottonwoods. They weren't much, but trees and shade were scarce in this part of Kansas, except for growth along streams. And, he knew, with Mary's care the trees and flowers soon would be thriving.

Mary Pepperdine loved flowers. And in the years that followed she transformed the grounds about the little cabin into a veritable garden of flower beds, rose bushes, morning glory vines, and geraniums. She also planted and tended a vegetable garden. No matter how busy she was with the many duties of a farmer's wife, she found time to care for her flower beds and rose bushes in summer and keep her potted geraniums alive in the house in winter. Mary would carefully water, prune and care for every plant, even to covering them with blankets on cold nights. John helped her prepare the flower beds in the spring, while at the same time mildly chiding Mary about her "weeds" which he said would never bring a crop of grain.

John Pepperdine was a good farmer. There seemed to exist between him and the earth some kind of silent understanding. He loved .the soil and gave it an industrious devotion which brought abundant harvests. He seemed to possess a sort of sixth sense about seasons and weather. This instinct led him to plant early in years which turned prematurely dry. The result was that his crops usually matured before drouth could blight them. An early wet fall or unseasonal freeze rarely damaged all his crops before they were harvested.

Soon his neighbors, observing his uncanny success with

growing things, began seeking his advice on planting and cultivating. John shared his counsel freely. As a result, he and Mary soon made a respected place for themselves in the sparsely settled community. Farmers, on their way to the village or sometimes in the evenings after chores were done, would drop by the small stone cabin and visit with them.

It was here in the stone cabin that George Pepperdine came into the world. The child grew and before his second summer had passed on the prairie, he was toddling all over the place.

With his increasing family, John found it necessary to enlarge the house. In that part of Kansas, the earlier homes had been built out of native stone simply because the only trees large enough to build log houses grew along larger streams and none were close enough to this area to fell for this purpose. But by the time young George came, there was a sawmill operation in Mound Valley and John was able to haul rough boards and timbers to build a lean-to kitchen and another bedroom on the back and one side of the stone cabin.

"Now we've got a real home," Mary observed with pride.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Spark of Business Genius

Had John Pepperdine been a little more imaginative about things other than farming, he might have identified a spark of budding business genius in his son George, then 5.

The hint came one summer Monday morning when the farmer went out to harness his horses. He couldn't find the trace chains and single trees.

Fred, puzzled too, could only shake his head. "I haven't seen them, Daddy," he said.

Mary, hearing the conversation, called from the kitchen, "My flat-iron and iron skillet are missing, too. Perhaps someone took them while we were at church yesterday."

John was doubtful. "I never heard of such a thing. Surely no one would steal such common things."

His wife came to the door. Suddenly a light dawned on her face. "Why don't you ask little George," she suggested. "He was awfully quiet and busy yesterday afternoon. He may be the guilty one."

"What possible use would he have for all those things?" wondered John.

"I can't imagine," Mary said, "but ask him."

John called the little boy into the house. He gave an inventory of the missing items.

"Did you take all those things?" the father asked.

"I guess so, Daddy," the boy said proudly. "I have lots of iron gathered up."

"Well, I heard a man say he had 'nough old iron to buy a Barlow knife," little George explained. "I'm going to sell iron, too."

"What's the idea?" John pressed sternly.

"Where is all this iron?"

"Down under the big cottonwood tree, Daddy. Come on and I'll show you."

George ran ahead of his parents to point out where he had gathered his treasure. Piled up there was an amazing assortment of iron, some of which they hadn't as yet missed. Unfortunately, the child had not been able to distinguish between junk and valuable farm and household implements for, mixed in with the broken plow shares and other cast-away items were the missing trace chains, single trees, flat-iron, skillet, a poker, shoe lasts and other useful and necessary paraphernalia.

The boy's ingenuity didn't escape the father, of course, and he also saw the humor of the situation. But he knew he also had to teach him a lesson. He explained the difference in the pieces the boy had collected — the useful and the useless. More importantly, he said sternly, was taking anything — useful or not — without his parent's permission.

"Now I want you to take everything back where you got it," the father ordered. "But first, George, I'm going to have to spank you, too, so you will always remember not to take things that don't belong to you."

The boy swallowed hard. His father took his arm firmly and administered a few light swats which caused more tears than pain.

"Now take it back," the father said as the five-year-old sobbed.

Then, as the little boy obediently loaded himself with

a couple of pieces of iron and started trudging sadly toward the barn, John Pepperdine sighed and picked up a larger load of his own; otherwise, he reasoned, he'd be there wasting the rest of the day to see that everything got back to where it belonged.

But even then the incident wasn't over and, in a way, it was the boy who finally got the last laugh.

At lunch time Mary said, "George was very upset over the spanking. He cried a long time. When I came out and asked him why he was crying so long, he said, 'Daddy spanked your part of me for what his part had done.'"

"What did he mean by that?"

"Don't you remember that he has always insisted that since both of us call him 'my boy' and he loves both of us the same, he divided himself in the middle and said that from the waist up he belongs to Daddy and the rest of him belongs to me? Well, his hands — your part — took the things, but you spanked his bottom — my part!"

John joined her laughter. "Then I guess I'd better make my peace with him. Seems if there's any spanking from now on you'll have to do it."

"Seems like it," Mary said.

Then seriously, she mused: "You know, John, I'm not even sure you ought to have punished him over this. Seems like anyone with that much get-up-and-go should be encouraged instead of punished."

He looked thoughtful. "I reckon I was wrong to do it," he said. "He is a smart little tyke and I'm proud of him. But what I was trying to teach him was not to take things that don't belong to him."

Mary patted her husband's hand. "I know," she said softly. "You did right. It's just that he's . . ."

This mother knew somehow her little boy had expressed unusual acumen. It's unlikely that she ever dreamed how much he really possessed until several years later.

Young George, despite his chagrin over his daddy's spanking his mother's part of him over the iron incident, did indeed learn the lesson of taking things that didn't belong to him. He forgot the lesson only once a few months later.

The next time he went on a gathering spree in hopes of making some money, he went out on the prairie to do it. He had heard that bones were worth money, so a few years later he started gathering up buffalo and cattle bones which he planned to market. Unfortunately, he never found enough of them to make a shipment profitable.

The spanking his father gave him was also not the last. George was a "typical" boy in the respect that he got into the typical mischief that all boys seem to manage.

One incident he remembered all his life came about one Sunday afternoon when the family was visiting in the home of a neighbor family by the name of McCormack. George was out playing with little Bill, about his age, while the parents visited inside the home. His mother had worked in her spare time for days to make the little new suit the boy was wearing. It was neat and pretty, a real "Sunday-go-to-meeting" suit, and the cost of the cloth had cut deeply into Mary's cash from the sale of eggs and butter.

As the parents visited, George and his friend Bill invented a game called "digging wells." It consisted of exactly that, digging little boy-size wells in the dirt, which in this particular instance, was mostly mud. As their well got deeper, George first sat down and then lay down to reach his arms down to lift the dirt to the surface. Naturally, his suit was a mess of mud and wrinkles by the time Mary went to collect the boy for the ride home.

"I forgot," was young George's excuse, over and over, as his parents discussed the way he misused his clothing as they rode home in the farm wagon, his parents in the spring seat and the muddy boy holding onto its back. As

promised by his mother, the spanking when they got home helped him remember not to be so careless in the future.

The second and final time George learned a lesson about property rights came when he and his mother were visiting the Bowman family about a mile away from their home. The Bowmans had a boy a little older than George but they were having a great time together trying to spin the Bowman boy's top. They were not very proficient in winding a string around the top and spinning it, so they began to use it as a ball for a while and then finally tired of that and began to play another game.

After George and his mother arrived home, Mary noticed the little top in George's waist pocket and asked him how it got there.

"Did he give it to you?" she asked.

"No," George answered. "When we got through playing with it, I just put it into my pocket so I could play with it again after I got home."

Mary didn't spank him this time, but she very firmly explained to the boy that bringing the top home that way was very akin to stealing and that they must go immediately back to the Bowman's and return it.

"It doesn't matter whether they know what became of the top or not," his mother explained. "The 'good Man' knows everything we do, everything we think about and sees us at all times, day and night. God would not be pleased with a little boy or anyone else who would take things that did not belong to him."

Such lessons stayed with George throughout his life.

CHAPTER FIVE

Enter the Spiritual Dimension

One of the most outstanding characteristics George Pepperdine was to remember all his life about his parents was their faith.

At the time when his childish misdeeds brought chastisement from his mother, she talked to him with feeling and understanding about God. But this had not always been so, even though both parents inherited a strict moral code. John's parents had not "practiced" religion, but they had come from rigid Episcopal stock. Mary, too, was not a member of any church at the time of their marriage, but her people had been Baptists.

So, when John and Mary Pepperdine moved to Kansas they were strongly moral people who believed in God but were not church goers or especially concerned about spiritual matters.

Shortly after the Pepperdines moved into the Cotton homestead though, a "protracted" meeting was held a few miles away in the Park school house. This gospel meeting was sponsored by the Church of Christ in Parsons, eighteen miles away. This congregation had considerable evangelical zeal and sent its minister into other localities to preach the gospel and help establish new congregations.

The Pepperdines, like most farmers in the area, learned with interest of the coming meeting. They were hungry for

human contact in their lives and looked forward eagerly to the fellowship it promised. But if they attended the meeting only out of a sense of gregariousness, they soon found themselves captivated by a moving vision of Christianity painted by this eloquent and forceful evangelist. The preacher spoke of their personal need for a Savior. He talked convincingly of Jesus as the One who could fulfill that need. He asked them to repent, confess Christ and be baptized into His name.

Thus John and Mary suddenly found more than they had bargained for when they decided to attend the meeting. They liked what they found and before the meeting ended both took the simple steps the preacher read from the Bible which would make them Christians.

As a result of the meeting, several other people of the community were also baptized and the nucleus of a church was formed. However, the number added to the church in this sparsely settled area was not large enough to build a church house of their own or to support a regular minister. Members of the church at Parsons, having planted, wished to see the seed grow and they shared their minister one Sunday each month for a long while with the new converts.

On the occasion of the monthly assembly, John would hitch the team to the wagon; then, with Mary dressed in her best and the boys scrubbed until their skins glowed, they would set off to worship.

John and Mary, as new converts to the Church of Christ, were firm in their adherence to the faith. They enjoyed the autonomous organization of the local congregation and the simple worship service. They remained faithful members of the church for the rest of their lives.

Years later, when George Pepperdine was 73, he wrote of the influence of his parents on his own religious life. In his autobiography, Faith is My Fortune, Mr. Pepperdine wrote:

"In the earliest dawn of my memory, when I was a very small child, even before I understood the meaning of many words, I was thrilled by my mother's telling me about 'the Good Man,' who sees us day and night, who knows what we are thinking about at all times, who watches us constantly and protects us every step of the way; that He loves us and we should love Him and try to do everything right, so that we may please Him.

"My father was a very plain and quiet man, reserved and most unostentatious. In all my life I have never known a man more faithful to God or more honest in all his dealings. On Sunday morning his 'first order of business' was to go to church whenever possible. He had very little formal education. His reading, other than the Bible, was very limited, because on the Western frontier in his early years settlers seldom saw any books, magazines or newspapers. However, he developed a most comforting and wholesome philosophy of life; a complete trust in the promises of God. As a farmer in a new land he gleaned a meager living from the soil on a claim in southeastern Kansas, beginning in the early 1880s. One of my most sacred memories is that of my father, after the evening meal, sitting in the old rocking chair, weary at the end of a day of labor in the field, reading the Bible until he fell asleep; the old kerosene lamp beginning to smoke, and mother calling him to wake up and get to bed.

"Memories of my parents will be bright jewels among my treasures as long as my life shall last. Truly, I am grateful for my Christian parents. Every virtue, every ability or high principle I have, I owe to them and to the Grace of God."

Many people who knew George Pepperdine over the years often marvelled at the faith of the man. They pondered how a person coming out of such a modest background, out of a rural community where the church was

small and weak, could develop such strong, unshakable Christian traits as he had. To George Pepperdine the answer was simple — the influence of Christian parents and the Grace of God.

CHAPTER SIX

School and Farm Episodes

Pepperdine University even today boasts of individual attention as one of the great advantages of its desirable student-teacher ratio. But no course in any subject at Pepperdine could be more desirable than the student-teacher ratio the school's founder experienced in his first educational venture. The entire "chart class" which was George's first classroom experience consisted of himself and a little girl named Alice. Their teacher was a farmer who supplemented their meager income by "keeping school."

Shortly before George became of school age, his father found a farm more to his liking and moved. It was owned by Mr. Parks, a neighbor who was willing to rent at a reasonable price, and the soil was not only more fertile and more level, the farm had a large, comfortable, two-story home and good barn. It was also a mile nearer to school. So it was with a mixture of nostalgia and elation that John and Mary packed their possessions and moved their family of three boys (the third child, Ben, had arrived a year earlier) from the crude cabin into their larger home in 1892.

From this new home George began his formal education. Each day he walked with his older brother, Fred, about a mile to Willow Branch School. This was a typical one-room

country school where one teacher had the responsibility for training all eight grades, a total of twenty to thirty children. In spite of this handicap and many others, including an abysmal ignorance of modern educational methodology, the teacher was able to turn out some very creditably trained pupils.

Noah Vincent, a patriarch of the frontier days and a stern and exacting school master, was the teacher at Willow Branch. As the only two students in the beginners class, Mr. Vincent would often allow his two smallest charges, George and Alice to play outside during good weather when they became weary during the long hours in class. Sometimes in the excitement of their games, the youngsters would become noisy enough to disturb the pupils inside at their lessons. A tap on the window sill would bring a sudden quietness from the pair.

In the spring, when warm days came, the two children would wander across nearby fields and pastures to hunt wild flowers, which they proudly brought clutched in grubby fists to the teacher. To his credit, he always accepted their wilted offering graciously, even though the flowers inevitably gave him a mild attack of hay fever!

Mr. Vincent's small farm adjoined the Pepperdine place. Because he had only forty acres, the land was not enough to support his huge family of fifteen children: twelve boys and three girls. Thus he found it necessary to teach school, for which he received the munificent salary of $30 a month, and the privilege for him and his older boys to work for other farmers in the area.

Apparently the life was good for Noah Vincent, however, because he lived to the ripe old age of ninety-five. And Mrs. Vincent, a strong sturdy woman despite having given birth to fifteen children, lived to be seventy-seven years old.

The Vincent home, filled as it was with children, was a happy place and the Pepperdine boys enjoyed visiting

there. George's special chum in the Vincent family was Chester, who was nearest to him in age. Those two, together with Will and Charlie Hale, who lived on the next farm, made up a group of four happy playmates. And no matter how many youngsters showed up at the Vincent home, Mrs. Vincent, a large and jolly woman, never seemed too busy to stop her work and prepare a treat for her brood and their little guests.

Not everyone in the area was so friendly. One was Mack Shy, who certainly failed to live up to his name. A tall, rough, stubborn boy who had little interest in his studies, he had always made trouble for every teacher who came to Willow Branch School. Thus, when Mr. Vincent, who was short in stature, came to the school, one of his first acts of discipline was to correct Mack Shy. In those days, no correction was considered effective for school trouble makers except a whipping, and that had to be a good one. For his first encounter with Mack, Mr. Vincent came to school with several large, keen switches and ordered the boy to stand and take his licking or be expelled from school. Whereupon, the teacher began vigorously laying the stripes across Mack's back, but the big boy only stood and laughed about it.

What the teacher didn't know until afterward was that some of the other, bigger boys had helped Mack pad his coat and pants with rags, shingles and burlap. Only one stroke bothered him in the least and that came when the end of the switch accidentally struck his wrist and made a big welt.

Not long after that episode, some of the boys "got even" with Mack where the teacher had failed. It was Chester Vincent, then about eleven, with the help of another boy, who gave Mack "what was coming to him."

They cooked up the scheme while on an ice skating outing. There was a large pond in the pasture near the school house and when it was frozen the boys were allowed

to skate on it during noon hour and recess time. When several warm days came, the ice would soften enough to become unsafe, especially on some portions of the pond. The boys would keep on skating even after the ice would begin to bend with their weight. They could skate over the weak places rapidly without breaking through but knew better than to stop.

One day when the ice was in the proper condition for their nefarious purposes, Chester and his chum decided to frame Mack Shy. They teased him about something until he started to chase them on his skates. When Mack began to gain on the smaller boys, they skimmed over the weak place on the ice. Mack, either unaware of the ice's condition or too mad to care, went through with a mighty splash. Fortunately, the water was only about knee deep and Mack was able to wade out, breaking ice with every step. He was plenty wet, cold and mad but was in no condition to do much about it as all the boys, large and small, enjoyed a big laugh at his expense. Chester was satisfied that he had given Mack his just dues for what he had done to his father, the teacher.

During those winter days of George's early years in school, the mile-long trek to class was quite a trip for the boy. To shod them for the journey through mud and ice, John bought them tough leather boots. The new footwear, costing $1.25 a pair, was the pride of the boys. George was certain that no one had ever possessed boots so fine. He would splash through shallow puddles, saying over and over to Fred, "See, my boots don't leak."

One morning, however, he discovered that even these fine boots had limitations. At a small stream not far from home, he waded through a little pool and to his dismay stepped in over the boot tops and suddenly found them filled with icy water. He squished his unhappy way back to the house. And next morning he learned a lesson in boot care

as he tugged and pulled to get the stiff, shrunken leather on his feet.

One of his first regular tasks was to help his mother churn the butter. Like most boys, it looked like a lot of fun — until he tried it. Then it didn't take long to become dull and tiresome. The monotonous up and down, up and down of the dasher in the huge churn wearied his arms until he thought they would drop off. Even the large mass of sweet fragrant butter, which by some mysterious process resulted from his labor, failed to arouse any enthusiasm. But George was the kind who dutifully kept to his task, enjoyable or not, and his mother's inevitable "thank you, George, you are a good boy and a big help to me" always brought a glow of happiness once the job was done.

George's father taught him to milk. His first attempt was a failure, for as he grasped a teat the milk escaped his fingers into the udder and he succeeded in producing only a few drops.

His father laughed. "You must be firm about it, son. Strip down like this." John applied his fingers expertly and a stream of milk splattered against the bottom of the pail.

Again George tried. This time he applied too much pressure and old Bossy looked around uneasily.

"It's a good thing it's old Bossy you're trying to milk," his father said. "Any of the others would have already kicked you winding."

Again the man showed the boy how to make a heavy stream of milk. "Remember, son, the milk flows out almost of its own accord if you know how. Don't press too hard or too easy. It's like anything else, hard until you know how, then it's easy. Here, try again."

This time the boy, grasping high against the udder, pulled firmly and was rewarded with a respectable stream of liquid.

"There, I did it," he said proudly.

While some farm chores George performed with stoical resignation, even though he performed them well, there was one job he always faced with dread after the novelty of the first time. During wheat and oat harvest season, George's chore was to ride a horse in the lead-team on the reaper-binder. This was not really hard work, but it became quite tiresome during long hours in the field.

Timing during the harvest was essential. A sudden storm of wind or rain might, ruin the whole crop. So the reaping of the grain was always a rush job to be accomplished as soon as the grain was ripe enough to cut. Therefore, it was necessary to start at daylight and work until dark.

The first time George was assigned to this task, like the churning, it looked like fun. But it wasn't long before the monotony of riding and the heat and long hours would cause the boy to get sleepy and let his attention wander, and so did the horses. As the lead-team would vary from the proper distance from the edge of the standing grain, the reaper would cut only a partial swath or else, when they went the other way, would ride over the uncut grain, mashing some of it down.

It frequently took a loud yell from his father on the reaper to wake the boy abruptly to the chore at hand.

George also found that there was a hazard in the job. If he were not careful, his leg would be caught between the horse he was riding and the one teamed with him. After he had had one such painful experience, his father said, "Keep your horse at a safe distance or else put your foot on top of the trace chain."

George tried that, but in that awkward and strained position, his leg would become cramped, whereupon, he would drop it down again, let his mind wander and forget to watch the off-horse and again would be jolted awake to

find his leg caught between the two chains. On several occasions, it caused painful loss of some skin.

Many years after those sometimes happy and sometimes tiresome days on the farm, George Pepperdine visited his old friend, Chester Vincent, in Albany, California. It was in July of 1958, and the two had seen each other only twice in the preceding fifty-five years. They recalled many of the incidents related herein and their memories went back to other children who attended Willow Branch School.

One of the things Chester recalled was having attended an auction sale where everything on the farm was put up for sale, including an old violin. Chester bought the old fiddle for seventy-five cents and it turned out to be a valuable antique, but, more importantly, Charlie, the budding young violinist, restrung the old violin and worked it over with the help and coaching of his father. With years of practice, he became an expert. Thirty years after that, while living in Chicago, George Pepperdine's old playmate became a member of the Old Time Fiddlers Club and won national honors. George never would have dreamed, in those early days on the farm, that his best friend would grow up to do something like that, or, for that matter, neither would Chester Vincent ever have guessed how far his friend would grow in prominence.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Harsh Seasons Strengthen a Man

As an area for conditioning man for the vicissitudes of life, physically speaking, the plains of Kansas rank high. Heat of summer, frigid cold of winter and all the variables and freaky things that happen in between are bound to make a man durable physically — if he survives them all.

It is little wonder, then, that eventually George Pepperdine, reared in the grim weather of Western Kansas, came to appreciate and love so much the balmy clime of Southern California. In his later life, George not only shivered in remembrance of the harsh winters on the prairie but recalled the tragedies which often accompanied the whimsies of nature in his early years there.

One tragedy came so close to home that George never forgot it. Kansas was noted for prairie fires when the grass and weeds became dry in the fall. In some places they were extremely dangerous, for it was often difficult to keep out of their path. When whipped by high winds the fire would sweep over many miles very quickly, burning the dry fields as well as grass and often destroying all animals in its path. The only protection was to back-fire a wide strip around buildings and fields ahead of time, when winds were low, so the fire could be headed off.

One day little Elizabeth Vincent, six years old, was playing with other children along the road some distance from their home when a prairie fire swept through, fed by a heavy growth of dry weeds along the roadway. Before the adults could find the children the fire struck the place where they were playing. All were rescued except little Elizabeth; her dress caught fire and she was burned to death before the parents could reach her.

Like all children, George enjoyed the winter snows. He liked to wade through it when it was deep in drifts and the white blanket provided great fun with homemade sleds. It also was a fine time for rabbit hunting.

Rains of spring and early summer were a different matter for they usually seemed to come at the most inappropriate time. The rains, although needed for the crops, were a handicap for raising baby chickens and turkeys.

The long, hot drouth from June to September was the most dreaded season, for that was when the rains were really needed for growing corn and other crops. George remembered how troubled his father always looked at such times. When the rains would finally come, John would pull his chair up to the kitchen door or out on the porch and just sit there with a contented smile on his face watching the rain fall on the fields.

The most exciting storm George remembered took place when he was about eight years old. In spite of the high wind and lightning, John was on the kitchen porch watching the rain come down. With the rain came wind with gale force and all at once the farm wagon began to roll across the yard, then the roof of the porch began to lift.

John Pepperdine knew that if the porch roof was blown away it would surely take the roof of the kitchen along with it. So he reached up, having nothing to work with but his hands and, being forced to act quickly, he swung his weight on the windward corner of the porch roof. George didn't

know how long his father hung there in the rain holding down the edge of the porch roof until the wind subsided, but he did remember how excited his mother became and how glad she was that Daddy saved the roof from destruction.

George also recalled that one of the big problems during a drouth was hauling water in barrels in the wagon for home use and for the horses, cattle, hogs and chickens to drink. When the ponds and water holes in the small streams dried up and the shallow wells failed, then farmers had to drive a distance to find a larger stream or a neighbor who had a deep well. Many of them drove to Janesville Spring, several miles to the east. Water kept in the barrels more than one or two days would get very warm in the hot weather, and the taste was not very refreshing.

As far as he could remember in later life, George required the services of a doctor only twice in his boyhood days. On the first occasion, when he was about nine, he was playing barefoot in an area where weeds had been mowed. The stub of a hard weed ran under the skin on his ankle about an inch, broke off and the broken end worked in so deeply that his mother couldn't get it out. They had to go to the village to have the doctor remove the weed stub.

The other occasion was when George was about 14. There had been a smallpox scare and the teacher advised parents to have all children vaccinated. The method used in those days by the village doctor was to make several short scratches on the arm with a sharp instrument, then scratch them cross-wise until the place bled freely. Vaccine was then applied to the wound and a bandage put over it.

"Now, son," the doctor told George, "if this takes, you will have a very sore arm; if it does not, you come back and I will do it over again."

It "took."

Not all was work and school and bad weather in Kansas

during George's boyhood and he always held fond memories of special occasions.

Christmas was such a time. The holidays of 1894 were not especially noteworthy, by today's standards, except that money then was a little more scarce than usual. The panic of 1893 still relentlessly gripped the nation and those who remembered the depression of 1873 were referring to it as a period of lush prosperity compared to economic conditions which prevailed in the 1890s.

In those days Christmas was celebrated in a less mercenary way than at present. Exchange of gifts was seldom practiced, although it was customary to have a Christmas party in each community. This celebration usually took place in the school house, where a tree was handsomely decorated with tinsel and wax candles. A local man, usually a merchant from the village or a minister, would dress up as Santa Claus and hand out small packages of candy, nuts and an orange to the children.

The simplicity of the celebration and the lack of expensive presents in no way detracted from the wonder and joy of the party. As children seem to know better than adults, Christmas is a condition of the spirit. As they sang the familiar refrains of "Peace on Earth, Goodwill to Men" that Christmas of 1894, there undoubtedly was rejoicing in Heaven at the sound of the happy, high, shrill voices of the young people. Christmas, too, meant a brief vacation from school — a time when George could join the Hale boys and Vincent children in rabbit hunts and other games.

The thing that George remembered most clearly about that particular Christmas was that he received a present. It was a beautiful red and white singing top which his mother gave him. It had a stem which extended up through a handle. On this stem he could wrap a string which, when pulled quickly, would send the top spinning over the floor. The top was hollow, with a hole in one side which caused

it to sing with a shrill tone, tapering off as the top slowed.

It took little to make children happy in those days.

One thing that was plentiful on the farm in George's boyhood was food, since they raised most of the things they ate. But one of the problems during hot summer weather was to keep milk, cream and butter from spoiling, since there was no ice or refrigeration such as farms of today enjoy with rural electrification or their own generators. Ice boxes were unknown in George's part of the world and even if the farmers had had them, the transporting of the ice would have been a problem. Most larger towns had ice plants, but few farmers lived close enough to enjoy this luxury. The first ice plant George ever saw was in Parsons several years later.

In some of the small Kansas towns there was an "ice house" where the owner would saw large squares of ice from the frozen pond or creek in winter and pack them deep in sawdust, where they would keep through at least part of the summer. Naturally, the price was high and farmers only rarely would bring home a chunk of ice. When they did, they would wrap it in quilts, canvas or burlap and even so, it would be half melted after hauling it in a wagon the several hours it took to get from town to farm.

Butter and cream were kept fresh on the farm by placing them in pails and lowering them into the deep well, low enough to touch the water. Care had to be taken that the milk did not upset and spoil the water. The shaded "milk house" with its long trough of milk jars was a familiar sight on most farms.

On the few occasions that John Pepperdine came home with ice, George and the other small boys were thrilled to get a small piece to eat. But the real purpose of this great luxury was to use the ice to make ice cream. Few farmers had ice cream freezers, but it was easy to rig up a homemade freezer by putting a one-gallon pail in a larger pail. This

presented somewhat of a problem, rotating the small pail properly and it was necessary to stop frequently to stir the mixture as it froze. The outer pail was usually made of wood staves with a hole drilled in its side at the right level to drain off the surplus water as the cracked ice between the two pails melted.

Mary made good ice cream, mixing pure country cream, eggs and the sugar and vanilla to produce the mouth watering treat. It was a gala occasion whenever homemade ice cream was served. And it was the custom to invite one or more neighbor families to share such a feast, which ordinarily happened only two or three times in a summer.

With that simple kind of life, then, it was no wonder that everybody in that part of the country got excited when the great national presidential campaign of 1896 touched their lives.

The year 1896 was marked by the colorful and uproarious campaign between William Jennings Bryan and William McKinley. Bryan's nomination as the Democratic candidate was the climax of a long period of agrarian and labor unrest. Few election campaigns in American history have been marked with so much excitement and bitterness. The Republicans, fearing Bryan's reform promises, especially the financial ones which were generally naive, poured millions of dollars into the effort to defeat the silver-tongued orator.

Even such small communities as Mound Valley did not escape the furor of the titanic battle. Feelings ran so high in the locality that George, then ten years of age, became aware for the first time of politics and heartily joined the "hurrah for Bryan" chorus yells. Most of the farmers in the area, including his father, were for Bryan. However, McKinley was not without his supporters. Dr. McCune, a local town physician, "stumped" for the Republican standard-bearer at every opportunity.

George was allowed to attend the political rally in the village. It included a parade which depicted the "16-to-l" slogan of the campaign by having 16 young ladies in the parade dressed in gowns covered with shining silver discs and a single gold disc. There was also a meeting held at the country school house where Dr. McCune denounced Bryan with scathing terms.

The boy came away from the affair wide eyed with excitement and surprise, for most of the farmers, generally amiable men, were stirred to muttering anger by the attack on Bryan. Most of the farmers thought Bryan was "for the poor man," and they all were surely poor. Probably more home remedies were concocted in Mound Valley that winter than usual in reaction to Dr. McCune's unpopular stand.

In the election, of course, Bryan went down to defeat, snowed under by McKinley's campaign manager, Mark Hanna, and the powerful Republican group. By 1897 the country was recovering from the desperate depression. McKinley's election was credited with providing a stimulus to the recovery and it was declared, whether true or not, that good business and the Republican's policies were not merely inseparable but synonymous. In any case, hoarded gold was brought from its hiding places and cautiously started to change hands. The process, once started, fanned into flame and economic fire and it was not long before they were burning merrily.

George, although a strong Republican in his adult life, never regretted that he yelled "Hurrah for Bryan" in 1896. He believed in the integrity of the farm people, and throughout his days believed that Bryan was a good man, that some of his ideas were noble and constructive, and that the rural people of that day drew conclusions from the best information available to them. However, in looking back on some of the "screwy ideas" of the Populist Movement,

which George regarded as decidedly socialistic in nature, he always said in later life that he was glad that Bryan was not elected.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Influence of Parents

George Pepperdine's parents both had a profound influence on him and he inherited traits from both which served him well throughout his life.

John Pepperdine was the easy going type — so patient, some neighbors felt, that he was inclined to let people run over him. Mary, on the other hand, was noted for having enough "spunk" for the whole family.

When anyone would say something about her small size, Mary Pepperdine would come back with, "Yes, I'm little but I'm loud — keep out of my way if you don't want to get trampled down."

She'd say that in jest, but Mary Pepperdine was a fearless person. And her son inherited that attribute as well as his father's patience.

Many farm women, when ready to have chicken for a meal, would call the husband to bring the hatchet and chop off the chicken's head; not Mary Pepperdine. When she wanted to cook chicken, she'd choose the bird she wanted, grab it by the head and quick as a wink turn it like a crank until the head was off. Within twenty minutes, after scalding the chicken so the feathers would come off easily, Mary could have the fryer sizzling in the skillet.

George thought his mother's fried chicken was the best in the world and he could never manage to hold as much as he wanted to eat. He also admired his mother's fearlessness and as soon as he was big enough, he took over the job of wringing the heads off the fowls.

George also admired his father's quiet patience, good humored jokes and lovable disposition. John's efficiency in farm work, his knowledge of grain and all crops, his understanding of livestock and the general business of farming were also appreciated by his family as well as neighbors.

Many times when George, as a small boy, would come into the house with a stubbed toe or mashed finger or a thorn to be removed or when he was simply hot and thirsty from playing, Mary would take care of his needs quickly and tenderly. She'd then give him a cup of milk, a big hug and squeeze and her pet expression of affection, "bless his little bones."

It was always a comfortable feeling to young George to know that sympathy could be expected from Mother, but he also knew that Mary could be firm when there was work to be done, no matter how badly George wanted to continue his playing. He did his work promptly and peacefully and never gave his mother any "back talk." It was with justifiable pride that Mary told friends, even after he was grown, that "George was one boy who never said a cross word to his mother."

Throughout his life, George Pepperdine had the quiet, peaceable disposition of his father and much of the plucky grit, courage and strong will of his mother. These character traits served him well during hard times as a farm boy and later as an adult in the world of business, which, of course, had its own dramatic ups and downs.

The years of 1893 and 1894 were times to test the dispositions of everyone. Black and threatening clouds of depression appeared on the horizon. Before these years had

run their doleful course, more than 570 banks had failed and about 18,000 commercial establishments in the United States went down to ruin. Many factories shortened their work time or closed down altogether. There were various causes for the depression, but certainly a prime one was the hard times among the farmers. Because American industries in those days depended almost wholly upon the domestic market, the decline of purchasing power in the rural areas was inevitably to make itself felt in the market place.

Along with all their neighbors, the Pepperdines suffered the pinch of these hard times. Price for farm products fell to an all time low. With dismay, John Pepperdine saw their income shrink. Sometimes cows sold as low as $10 each, and prices of beef declined until he counted himself fortunate to receive three cents a pound for an occasional fat steer and fifty cents a bushel for his wheat.

Mary helped in every way, especially with butter, eggs, chickens and garden products. Their cash crops were so insignificant that she thriftily accumulated butter and eggs for a trip to the village on Saturdays. A little grimly, John would hitch up the heavy wagon, for at that time he could not afford a buggy, to make the all-day trip to Mound Valley. There he would receive 10 cents a pound for fragrant country butter and twenty-five cents for three dozen eggs. The only consolation a man had in this situation was that prices of stable goods, clothing and other supplies were correspondingly low.

Despite the hard times, the six-mile trip to Mound Valley was always a treat for the Pepperdine youngsters. This village was the only town George ever saw up to the time he was 10 or 12 years of age. It boasted a general store, operated by the Wise Brothers, which handled groceries, dry-goods and clothing. There was also a small hardware store, a livery stable, a doctor's office and a small lumber yard.

The lumberman, Billy Wilson, was also a grain buyer

and a good friend of John Pepperdine. The two men enjoyed talking about crops, politics and religion.

The other places of business were a drug store, a cafe and a harness shop. George particularly enjoyed the latter because he liked the smell of the new leather harness and saddles.

One day when John returned from town and handed Mary the pitifully small amount of money her butter and eggs brought, she presented her husband with an idea which had just come to her.

"I've been thinking while you were gone, John; why couldn't I raise turkeys and bring in some money that way?"

John shook his head doubtfully. "Turkeys are fearfully hard to raise. It's easy to lose a whole hatch."

Mary's lips set in stubborn lines. "I know the Vincents lost all their little turks last spring and a couple of other neighbors lost most of theirs, but it was just plain carelessness. They let the little babies get wet. I promise I'll take better care of mine than that."

What Mary proposed was to hatch the turkey eggs under chicken hens, her reasoning being that the mother hens would keep the turkey chicks closer to the house. Turkey hens were notorious for wandering so far from the farm houses that their chicks would "come up missing."

"Well," John said finally, "if you think you can manage it along with all your other work, I'm willing for you to try."

"The boys will help me," Mary assured him. "If you'll build some coops and a shed, we'll manage"."

She was as good as her word. With the help of the boys, John built a run and shelters. Investing some of their precious cash, Mary bought turkey setting eggs and in due time a flock of tiny turkeys, their thin, shrill voices music to her ears, were running about the yard following the chicken hens that hatched the eggs. She kept the little turkeys cooped up early in the morning to keep them from getting

wet in the heavy dew on the grass and weeds. She herded them in quickly when rain threatened. She fed them plenty of "clabber cheese" and gave them cracked grain and "mash" as soon as they were old enough to take such food. Whether it was the pressure of their sad financial plight or the challenge of the difficulties involved in raising the birds or a combination of both which motivated her, Mary had rare success with her project.

Only a few turkeys were raised the first year, but within three years the crop was large. They brought about one dollar each for a 20-pound bird. When the birds, just over a hundred in number, were marketed in the fall, Mary had the satisfaction of knowing that she and John had an additional hundred dollars to swell their cash resources. That money assured winter clothes for the boys and staple groceries for the family.

John was elated over the successful venture and praised Mary for her enterprising endeavor.

"You're a wizard, Mary. We have realized more from the sale of your turkeys than from the part of the corn crop which I can spare to sell. Maybe we should quit farming and turn to raising turkeys."

Mary laughed. "You keep right on with your farming. I was lucky this year, but I might not always be. We have some turkey hens and a gobbler now and I'll set more eggs next spring. At least, with the turkey hens laying, we won't be out the cost of setting-eggs. I want to put aside every egg that is laid for hatching."

So the turkey project kept on being successful, but, with the presence of the turkey hens, new problems developed as far as young George was concerned. These hens had a half-wild nature and the troublesome habit of stealing away a half mile or more from home and hiding their nests in brush, fence rows and tall weeds like their primitive ancestors. The nests would often be robbed by dogs, coyotes,

skunks and other animals before George could find them and frequently a hen would come up after the setting period with only two or three little ones, if any.

It was George's job to trail the turkey hens and find their nests so that each evening a "doubtful" chicken egg could be placed in the turkey nest and the turkey egg taken home for hatching by the chicken hens. This was quite a detective job because the wily turkey hens would not go to their nests as long as they realized they were being watched.

So George had to hide from their view, but still remain close enough to discover just about where to search for the nest as soon as the hen returned home after laying her egg for the day. This process had to be followed with all the hens, so it became almost a full time job for the boy for a few weeks each summer.

Living off their land was a vital function in those days and many and varied were the projects which contributed to the larder. One of the interesting and delicious contributions to the family was the production of sorghum.

Early in the fall, John and the boys would strip the cane before cutting it. Under their quick hands the stalks, denuded of blades, stood in barren rows but with a promise of sweet goodness within them. After the cane was headed and cut the stalks were hauled to a mill two miles away where the juice was made into molasses on a share basis.

The process involved in turning the raw cane into sweet, delicious sorghum was relatively simple. The juice was squeezed from the stalks by short upright rollers which were turned by a horse hitched to a long overhead pole. The patient animal went around and around turning the press. The juice, as squeezed out in a thin trickle, was piped into a long copper pan which was divided into four sections. As the liquid boiled, it thickened and was dipped into the next compartment for more boiling. With long wooden

ladles and scoops the men stirred, skimmed and controlled the cooking of the juice. To know when to add wood to the fire, to change the liquid from one section to another, to stir and prevent scorching — all this required considerable skill. If a man knew his business, when the sorghum was drawn out from the last division in a golden stream, it was not too thick nor too thin and had a flavor that would set the mouth watering. The boiling process went on from early morning to late at night and the mill was a popular gathering place in the evening for the people of the community.

When the winter's supply of sorghum was brought to the Pepperdine home in large cans and pails, Mary would bake fresh yeast bread. Corn bread was the usual diet on the farm because it was plentiful and less expensive than wheat flour. However, on special occasions yeast bread was made, and there could be no better special occasion than when fresh sorghum was brought to the house. The amount of fresh butter and hot yeast bread which the family consumed was amazing. After such a feast the family was content to return to corn bread which, with plenty of home grown fruit, eggs, vegetables, butter, milk and meat was very satisfying and nourishing. The children always liked their corn bread and milk at bedtime and it was a habit George Pepperdine never did completely outgrow.

Watermelons, cantaloupes, pumpkins and berries also contributed to the Pepperdine larder. The boys enjoyed finding a ripe melon in the field. They liked to break it open and eat only the heart, even though they knew that melons were better when brought home and sunk in the cool well water for a few hours.

Cantaloupes (called muskmelons in the country in those days) were also much appreciated, but they were used more as vegetables and served with meals rather than as a dessert treat.

Cucumbers were another favorite of the children. The large ones were sliced and served fresh with vinegar on them; the small ones made into pickles. Gathering the cucumbers was invariably "a boy's job," George learned at an early age.

Golden pumpkins on the vine, either in the cornfield or in a separate patch, always thrilled the boys, who willingly carried them in and helped Mother cut them up to prepare for pumpkin pies. Mary knew how to put in just the right seasoning but she never did learn how to keep the boys from overeating her pumpkin pies. Just as he often begged for a whole fried chicken, George always wanted a "whole pie," but had to settle for less even though Mother sometimes let him overindulge in this favorite.

Wild blackberries and raspberries were wonderful food but these were hard to find. Although plentiful, the brier thickets were so dense that the pickers always ended up with many scratches and digs from sharp thorns trying to get through the patch to where the best berries were always hiding. Another problem the boys had was getting enough berries in the pails. George admitted that many times more berries went into his mouth than into the pail.

Thrifty and energetic farmers, especially the families with housewives like Mary Pepperdine, never overlooked any possibilities in drying or canning fruits and vegetables. Apples, peaches and other fruits were peeled, quartered and cored or seeded, then placed on the roof of the porch on canvas in the hot sun — with netting to keep away the flies — and the result was delicious dried fruit which kept long and well.

Fruits and vegetables not suitable for drying were cooked and canned in glass jars or one-gallon syrup pails in which the lids could be sealed with old-fashioned sealing wax. George helped his mother in these duties also.

In the absence of modern facilities for freezing and keep-

ing food, it was necessary for the farmers to devise their own crude and primitive methods of saving fruit and vegetables for winter use. In addition to the usual processes of canning fruit, cooking grape butter, preparing dried fruit and smoking and salting down meats, there was the "potato hill" which yielded (up) apples and other goodies boys like.

Very few farmers in those days had freeze-proof basements or cellars in which to store vegetables, so it was common practice to use the "potato hill." To build this, an elevated spot was selected where the water would drain away and a heavy layer of straw or hay placed on the ground with a covering of canvas, burlap or corn husks. Then several bushels of potatoes and other vegetables and fruits were piled thereon and covered with more canvas and straw or hay. This mass was covered and banked all around with dirt to form a mound over the cache at least two feet deep to cover the fruit and vegetables.

Such a "potato hill' would keep the produce from freezing and preserve it for several months. Since freezing air was detrimental to the contents of the hill, the produce was removed as needed by simply making a hole large enough in the mound for a man's arm and a small rod hook to reach in and snag a few days supply of food, then the hole was securely packed again to keep out the zero weather.

Sweet potatoes were a choice food, but were sometimes difficult to handle. The plants were grown on ridges and the vines allowed to spread for a considerable distance. It was desirable to keep sweet potatoes in the ground as late as possible in the fall, but if an early frost should strike the vines it would cause the sweet potatoes to turn black. Therefore, at the first indication of frost, John would urge the boys to "chop the vines quickly or we'll lose the crop."

Even the pleasant pastime of fishing sometimes pro-

duced food for the Pepperdine table. When they moved to the Park place one of the things that was most pleasing to George was the proximity to a creek large enough to have a few swimming holes and fishing places. Boys in those days, of course, did not have access to modern fishing tackle nor the money with which to buy it. They were lucky to find a long slender hedge or willow sprout straight enough to use for a pole. Lines were homemade from twisted wrapping string, a bottle cork served as a float, buck shot was used for a sinker and the only thing that had to be purchased was the hook.

George learned to find angle worms in the moist ground for bait and that you must "spit on the bait" to make catfish bite. He was successful in catching many small catfish and perch and his mother would clean and cook them.

Fishing was lots of fun for George when the biting was brisk, but sometimes there was a long weary wait. When the cork would bob he would get excited and could hardly wait to pull in the line. As soon as the fish started away with the bait, taking the cork under water, it was then time to pull. What a thrill it was to hook onto a fish George hoped would be a big two or three pounder, then a bit of a let-down when he brought it on the bank, only to find it weighed maybe a quarter of a pound.

George learned another important lesson with his fishing experience — sharing — which had a profound effect on his later life. Very often his catch was too small to provide a meal for his family, whereupon, his mother suggested the first time that happened that he take them to an aged widow who lived on an adjoining farm.

CHAPTER NINE

"Turn the Other Cheek"

As a lad growing up on the farm, young George got into trouble now and then, as has already been noted. He got along remarkably well with his friends and was never known to start a fight. One day, however, he was forced into his first and only fight and it is significant that the altercation was over somebody else.

George had had the usual insults that children sometimes hand out but had always been inclined to "turn the other cheek" — not that he didn't have the courage to fight but simply that he didn't see any sense to it and felt it was wrong.

George was about ten at the time honor seemed to demand that he take drastic physical measures with a bully in the neighborhood. This decision came after the bully — a boy about George's size — repeatedly pushed little Ben, then five, into mud- along the side of the road on the way home from school.

The first time it happened, George warned the bully. The second time, he promised to do something about it if it didn't stop. The third time, George landed fiercely on the bully, let go a fist, landed a blow that bloodied his nose and then held him on the ground until he promised to quit "picking" on Ben. The bully kept the promise.

Like most boys, George also experimented with the use

of tobacco a couple of times — both times with sickening results.

When he was about ten, George had his first taste of smoking tobacco. The opportunity came during a "chivaree,' a custom in those days of men and boys to have a stormy party immediately after a wedding ceremony.

The "chivaree" participants would gather around the house after dark, making sure the newlyweds were there, then the celebration would begin. Shotguns were fired into the air, old tin pans were banged and the sides of the house were pounded and scraped with pieces of board.

When the groom would open the door the noise would stop, but he had to be prepared to pass around a box of cigars to pacify the mob, otherwise, the groom would be carried away from his bride for a day or two.

On the occasion of George's first such experience, at the wedding of the Hale's oldest daughter, he took a cigar and lighted up the same as the others. He was never too sure exactly what happened after that, but his older brother told how he was stretched out over the pile of coal in the back yard at the Hale home and how he lost all of his dinner.

Twice bitten, George quickly lost any desire for tobacco in any form and throughout his life tobacco smoke was very offensive to him. George used to say that such an experience as he had with tobacco would be an excellent way for all youngsters, if the results could be the same throughout their lives.

Another painful memory George carried from his childhood was an experience he had with bumble bees. These big black bees and their stingers carried a devastating impact. One of the great sports of the larger boys of the neighborhood on Sunday was to go bumble bee hunting in the late summer and fall. Gathering the honey was only incidental to the sport.

A number of boys would go out over the meadows and pastures until they found a nest by following one or more bees. They would then surround the nest, armed with perforated paddles or bunches of long weeds, and fight the bumble bees after one boy would run in and stir up the nest with a pole or pitch fork.

George was wise enough not to risk the angry bees and would stand at a safe distance while the older boys engaged in the dangerous sport.

When he finally did tangle with the bees one day, it was strictly an accident. He was ten or eleven years old at the time and was driving a hay rake which scraped over and demolished a nest. The cloud of big black bees lost no time in organizing an attack. They drove the horses into a frenzy and then turned on George. He couldn't fight the bees because he had his hands full holding the horses to prevent them from running away and wrecking the hay rake. George finally got away from the swarm but he had lost the battle and was in a miserable condition for several days with painful bee stings.

George also remembered how the older boys would "jug" the bumble bees and then use them in some pretty rough pranks. To get the bees in the jug, the boys would partially fill the gallon container with water and place it near the nest before prodding it. The bees would attack the jug and then curiously crawl inside to the water, where they would get their wings wet and then could not get out or fly.

With the captured bees floating helplessly on the water, the boys would take the jug to a favorite swimming hole just a short time before they knew other boys would be coming there to swim. They would pour out the bees and water in the grass on the edge of the water hole. Thus, about the time the swimmers would begin to enjoy themselves the bees would be dried out enough to fly and ready

to attack the nearest enemy that was available. The unlucky boys in the pool had no weapons of defense and no protection except to stay under water and fight the bees away from their heads until the bees got tired of waiting and flew away.

The main reason George got into as little mischief as he did as a boy — besides the fact that he was by nature a peaceful child — is that he was never a victim of that wise old saying, "idle hands are the devil's workshop." George simply was never idle very long. If there wasn't work to do, there were plenty of "fun" things to occupy his time. For instance, when the cold nights and warm days of autumn came to Kansas, and it was rabbit hunting time. George, at nine, was even more of a hunting enthusiast than fourteen-year-old Fred and it was he who went running to Daddy with a hopeful gleam in his eye.

"Daddy, can Fred and I go hunting with the Hale boys on Saturday?" he asked.

The Hale boys had a .22 rifle and a muzzle-loading shotgun and these wonderful possessions made them the envy of other boys in the vicinity.

"Yes," John said, remembering his own boyhood, "you two have been good helpers with the work, but I want you to be careful with the guns. Your mother and I don't want one of you boys to get shot."

"We'll be careful, Daddy, real careful," the boys promised.

Their rabbit hunting always followed the same general pattern. The young nimrods would tramp across fields and pastures flushing their game from corn fields, fence rows and brush patches. Great was their jubilation when hunting was good, for there was always a demand in fall and winter for fresh rabbits at the general store in Mound Valley. The hunters felt themselves fairly remunerated at five cents a

rabbit. And, sometimes, after ammunition was paid for, they cleared twenty-five cents a day.

With the hunting and fishing and other pastimes, along with all the farm chores to handle year-round — plus such special momentous occasions as wheat-threshing time, George's days on the farm were filled with activity. He was still a very young man when he began his unusual mechanical experiments and assorted business ventures which were to set the pattern for his highly successful career in the world of business.

CHAPTER TEN

Young Business Adventurer

John Pepperdine's desire to own a better farm, though suppressed during the lean years of America's economy during the waning years of the Nineteenth Century, was still strong within him. With the return of better times, he hopefully began to plan to make the dream a reality. In spite of the depression years, through hard work and diversified farming efforts, he and Mary managed to accumulate a few hundred dollars.

John finally found a buyer for the old Cotton Homestead. With this added money he was able early in 1898 to make a down payment on a farm called the "Woods Place," four miles west of Mound Valley. The new property consisted of 160 acres, for which he agreed to pay $10 an acre, or $1600.

The land was rolling and quite good for oats and corn, although not level enough nor with soil suitable for raising wheat. However, because of his ability as a farmer his neighbors were willing to rent John some level land two miles away for grain. His experience had demonstrated the feasibility of diversified farming and, with his boys old enough to be of real help in the field work, he decided to try it out on a larger scale. John also rented additional land in the hill country for corn and pasture, which allowed him to increase his herd of Herefords for beef and to buy several more brood sows.

The former owner of the Woods farm was unable to vacate the house for several weeks after the sale was concluded thus it was necessary for John and Fred to go to the place to plow the land then plant the corn and oats before the family moved. Mary, George and Ben remained on the Park farm ten miles away to care for things there.

It was a rather hectic spring for all concerned. There was a sense of impermanency about the place which George had learned to regard as home, so it was an exciting day in early May when all the household goods were loaded into the wagon and they started for the new home.

The former owner had neglected the farm and George, then nearly twelve years old, was disappointed in his first look at the place. Accustomed to order, he was repelled by overgrown fence rows, high weeds and the general run-down condition. Another disappointment awaited the boy. His father had kept saying he was going to buy him a present, something nice and new, when they moved. No amount of urging could make John give the smallest hint of what the present would be.

As soon as he jumped from the wagon at the new home, he cried, "Now, Daddy, we are here. Where is the new present?"

"Do you really want to know?" his father teased, grinning.

"Yes. You promised to tell me when we moved."

"I'll get it," John answered solemnly as he walked to a nearby shed. "It is something you need very much." It was a brand new goose-necked hoe.

For a moment the boy's disappointment and vexation was so great he felt like weeping, but his sense of humor asserted itself and he burst out laughing. His parents joined the laughter and then John explained the real purpose for the joke.

"I'll have to return to the Park place in June to harvest the wheat," he said. "If you will use this hoe to cut out the cockle burrs in the corn, I'll buy you a new red leather riding bridle for old Nellie after the harvest."

George already knew something of the labor involved in the hoeing of the corn, but was nevertheless thrilled by the promise and agreed to take care of the weeds.

Then another thought entered his head. "Maybe we can get a saddle, too."

"Maybe," his father replied. "But you'll have to earn the money for the saddle."

"How much will a saddle cost?" George asked.

"I saw one about your size for $3.45 in town the other day," John said.

"I've got a dime," the boy said optimistically.

John laughed. "Well, that's a start. You'll need thirty-three more dimes and a nickel besides."

The boy's face fell. "How'll I ever get that much money?"

John's idea was a natural for his energetic and ambitious young son.

"This place is over-run with cottontail rabbits," he said. "Maybe you can catch some of them and sell them in town."

"How?"

"Back home in Illinois when I was a boy we caught rabbits in a box trap. I expect you could do the same."

"Will you show me how to make one, Daddy?"

"Yes," his father promised, "later in the summer. In cool autumn weather rabbits get fat, then they are good to eat and good for the market."

True to his promise, one evening before cold weather came, John showed his son how to build a rabbit trap. It was a fairly simple affair of four boards about two feet long and six inches wide nailed together to form an oblong chute. Across one end were placed some narrow vertical

strips. The opening was fitted with a sliding door which fell down when released by the trigger which came through a hole near the back end of the trap. Trigger and door were connected by an overhead arm. Behind the trigger, bait was placed and the snare was ready for use. George, elated by visions of nickels and dimes, insisted on trying the trap immediately.

"I'd set it in the garden then, for the rabbits are thick there," suggested his mother.

Eagerly, with George carefully carrying the trap and Ben the lantern to light the way, the boys went into the garden. George was thinking; if it really worked he could build others and catch several rabbits each night. At a nickel each, it wouldn't take him long to get enough money to buy the saddle for old Nellie.

Next morning at John's call the boy jumped from bed, scrambled into his clothes, took the lantern, for it was still dark, and ran to the garden. His heart was beating wildly as he neared the trap. Would there be a rabbit inside? As he approached it the rays of his light revealed that the trap door had fallen. His heart beat harder. Almost fearfully he knelt, held the lantern to the door and peered inside. To his amazement, he found himself looking into the solemnly blinking eyes of their small house cat!

While George was disappointed with his "catch," still he had proved that the trap would work. That night he again set the trap, and his hope for better results was rewarded with a cottontail early next morning when he went to check the trap.

From this time on George had an absorbing interest. Every hour he could spare from the seemingly endless chore of farm work he spent making traps. Soon he used up all the pieces of loose lumber about the farm. Even this did not stop him. Every stray box and crate was demolished and turned into a rabbit trap. Then he turned to salvaging any

boards available from fence or building and woe to the board that wasn't securely nailed down. His only tools were a claw hammer and an old "buck saw" which was designed to cut stove wood. The narrow saw blade wobbled and refused to follow a straight line but it served well enough that George made serviceable rabbit traps.

And George's traps caught rabbits! Business boomed. As winter came on there was a demand for his catch. As new traps were made it became necessary to locate them farther and farther from the house until he had about fifty traps strung over a two to three mile route.

After school some days, and on Saturdays George made the trip to town on old Nellie to sell the rabbits. All this added to the boy's work, but he made no complaint, nor did he neglect his share of the regular farm work and chores. The fact that he was steadily adding, nickel by nickel to his savings for the new saddle spurred him on.

George eventually did get his saddle. And along the way he learned several interesting lessons about the world of commerce. Competition was the first to enter the picture. When mid-winter and deep snow came, hunters turned out in great numbers and flooded the market with so many rabbits that the price dropped to two cents each and sometimes as low as a penny.

Another lesson he learned, before the market became overstocked with this commodity, was to later bring him spectacular success in the business world. He discovered that the more traps he built and set the more rabbits he caught. Not every trap would get a rabbit every night, to be sure, but by having many traps he was almost certain to have a few animals in the morning.

He learned, too, that success required a lot of effort. Some of his school mates, observing what George was doing, decided to follow his example. They put out a few traps but it wasn't long before the chore of running the line each

morning and cleaning the catch, that one by one they wearied of the project and eventually left George as the sole trapper in the area. It was this same drive to succeed as a boy with a chain of rabbit traps that later spurred George Pepperdine, the man, to succeed with a chain of auto supply stores.

Another lesson, George learned was that overproduction was not the only hazard to business success. In his particular venture at this time, his worst pitfall came in the form of numerous small, dark gray skunks, which were continually getting into George's traps before the rabbit arrived to get the bait. There was no market for these little pests and they would smell up the trap so badly that rabbits would steer clear of the box until the smell disappeared.

Once in awhile an opossum would be his find. That was one reason George never ran his hand into a trap without first looking to make sure he wasn't sticking the hand into the hissing mouth and sharp teeth of one of these fierce animals.

While the gray skunks were a nuisance, George yearned to capture one of the large black skunks with white stripes because he had heard that their hides brought fifty cents, or as much as the price of ten rabbits. These skunks were too large to enter a rabbit trap, but one cold winter day when George was hauling in shocks of corn fodder for cow feed, he moved a shock and uncovered a fine black and white specimen. George immediately attacked it with his pitchfork and soon won the first round of the battle, but he lost the second round. George eventually got his fifty cents for the hide but the skunk got in the last lick, for George went home smelling like anything but the proverbial rose.

His mother wouldn't let him come into the house until after he had taken a bath and changed clothes. It was customary, where rural people had no bath tubs, for baths to

be taken in the wash tub on the kitchen floor during cold weather. But this luxury was not permitted in this case. Water for his bath had to be heated in pails on the kitchen stove and handed out to him. He then poured the hot water into the tub in the smokehouse.

By this time George realized that, although he had enjoyed a fine business success, he personally got the worst end of the deal. His overalls, shirt, coat, underwear, hat, socks and shoes had to hang out of doors for many days until the skunk aroma disappeared.

Eventually, as is inevitable in the lives of all boys, George, as a successful rabbit trapper with a new saddle and other assets, began to dream of owning a bicycle. This desire hit George very hard, during the spring of 1899, when he was almost thirteen years old. He actually dreamed of owning a bicycle; awake and asleep he tormented his parents continually to help him get one.

Among other things, George argued that since the next year, 1900, was the beginning of a new century and there was to be a presidential election, the bicycle would be needed many times to go into town for a whole assortment of important reasons. His arguments fell on deaf ears usually except times when the boy was exceptionally pressing in his campaign. John would point out bikes cost $20 and "we can't waste money on a new bicycle." was his decision.

George pressed his case the last time his father said that with, "Even if I make the money selling rabbits?"

His father laughed. "You'll be too old to ride one by that time."

"But if I do? I have already saved up seven dollars," countered George.

"Okay, son," his father sighed, "if you can buy one for that price."

That was all the boy needed. Before summer arrived George learned of a Mr. McDonald, who lived several miles

away, with a second-hand bike for sale for $7. This was just within his reach and his father gave his permission. Since the roads at the time were very muddy, John took the boy in the farm wagon to see about the bicycle.

It was far from new. The paint was peeling and here and there were scars and dents. The tires were old and showed the result of many encounters with rocks and bumps in the road. To George's eyes, however, it was a thing of wonder, and no amount of attempted self-control or pretended indifference could disguise his eagerness to possess that bike.

On Mr. McDonald's prompting, he straddled the machine and rode it about the yard. By now, obviously, any ideas he had been harboring about bargaining in the transaction fled from his mind.

"How much are you asking for it, Mr. McDonald?"

"I figure $7 would be a fair price, young fellow."

Without a moment's hesitation, George plunged his hand into his pocket and drew out his hard earned money. Solemnly he counted out the amount, then, with John's help, the bike was loaded into the wagon, since the roads were too muddy to ride it, and they bade Mr. McDonald farewell. It would have been difficult to find in all of Kansas a boy more elated than young George as the wagon rumbled slowly homeward.

One of the arguments George had used to gain his parent's consent for his purchase of the bicycle was that many important events in town were in the offing and that a means of easy communication between the farm and the village, four miles away, was a necessity. It did indeed turn out to be an eventful period during those closing months of the nineteenth century.

In 1898 the United States had become involved in a quarrel with Spain over conditions in Cuba, one of Spain's colonial possessions. In an air of mounting tension the

U.S. battleship Maine was blown up in Havana harbor in February, 1898. This made war almost inevitable; indeed, on a rising tide of public indignation, whipped up by certain newspapers, the U.S. was at war with Spain by the middle of April.

Very few of the farmers ever saw a daily newspaper and there were no radios. Some of the farmers took a small weekly paper which came from the state capitol, Topeka. It gave a short summary of many news items. However, the railroad agent at the village received telegraphic news giving brief sketches of important happenings about the world; then, by word-of-mouth, the news soon covered the village and filtered out into the rural districts.

George did not escape the excitement of these events for, while Kansas was far removed from the center of activity, the very tranquility and isolation of the rural scene made news of distant occurrences more than of passing interest. Admiral Dewey's defeat of the Spanish fleet at Manila, the exploits of Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders and the surrender of Cuba — all these exciting victories were enough to stir the imagination and stimulate the pride of any boy.

The assassination of President McKinley was a shocking occurrence to the whole nation. The news came to Mound Valley via the telegraph. It happened that John was in town unloading his wagon-load of wheat into a boxcar when the news was received. Although many of the farmers had bitterly opposed McKinley as a President, there were none who rejoiced at the dastardly shooting of the chief executive. When he reached home, John, in a quiet and solemn voice, told the family of the tragedy.

"You mean he was shot like President Lincoln?" the boy asked.

"I guess so. The President isn't dead, but he is in very critical shape," John replied.

"What will we do for a President if he dies?" the boy asked.

"Vice president Theodore Roosevelt will be President."

"You mean Colonel Roosevelt of the Rough Riders?"

"Yes. Now get on with the shoveling. I want to get the wagon loaded before night."

George got on with the shoveling, but he began to ponder more than ever about that big world out there so far away.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

His Head an "Idea Factory"

George Pepperdine, as an early teenager, continued to work cheerfully on the farm, but his heart was not always in his work. His mind turned to thoughts of guns and boats and rabbit traps or some gadget he wanted to make, so he was always hurrying through the tasks assigned to him in order to get started on some exciting or fanciful project of his own.

Often referred to as a boy who was "as full of ideas as a dog was full of fleas," many of his ideas were fantastic and impractical, but not all of them. He showed a keen interest in all mechanical things, but farm machinery and mechanisms within his reach were limited and too simple to challenge his fertile imagination very much. Thus he was continually trying to make some kind of contraption but his inventive skill was severely handicapped by lack of a workshop or tools. The farm tools included only a hammer, saw, punch, chisel, wrenches and a few other tools he had made.

Much time was spent by the boy on fanciful ideas such as "flying machines" and high powered motors designed to use gun powder for fuel in place of gasoline. Fortunately, perhaps, in the interest of his safety, that last idea faded away in the absence of tools or money with which to buy parts and supplies.

George did manage, with his limited tools, to assemble several workable contraptions which showed a great deal of inventive genius. He didn't grow up to be an inventor, but the ideas that he had as a boy which produced these creative things were of the same sort which served him so well a few years later to build his widespread chain of successful stores.

One of the things that he invented was a wind motor. In the summer time the prevailing wind came from the south. Sometimes it was very strong. George made ordinary windmills in various sizes, but these did not satisfy his curiosity and desire to get more power out of the strong south wind. So he came up with an idea to improve on the traditional windmill.

Along one side of the corral, back of the barn, there was a stone wall fence about four feet high, running east to west. This wall stood at right angles to the wind. The current over the top of this wall was very strong and it was here that the lad undertook to harness its power. On the north side of the wall he built an "air wheel" from wood slats and canvas. The wheel was about four feet in diameter and four feet long. Its axle was placed level with the top of the wall, paralleling it, so that the full force of the wind blew straight against the big two-by-four foot blades which extended full length above the wall. As one blade was forced over by the wind, the next blade came into action, so that considerable power and speed were developed.

The boys had fun rigging up belts and pulleys to utilize the power, but failed to make any practical use of it. It would have saved George a lot of muscle power in cutting stove wood if he could have used the power to run a circle saw. However, such a saw cost too much money, whereas "boy power" was cheap and plentiful for operating the bucksaw and axe.

George's homemade boat was quite a delight to him

and to Ben. They had only small ponds and water holes in the creek for boating, so thirty to fifty feet was about as far as they could row in a straight line. George improved on the ordinary oars, however, by putting a wood shaft across the boat with a paddle wheel on each end and a crank in the middle, making it a regular "side wheeler."

On one occasion the boat caused some consternation for the family. The boys had been playing in the boat and shortly afterward young Ben disappeared. The parents became frightened, thinking that Ben might have gone back to the boat alone and fallen in the water. They called, looked all around the place and throughout the house; there was no answer. John waded all through every foot of the pond to see if the little fellow, then about seven, might have drowned. Finally Ben came up from the machinery shed rubbing his eyes. He had been asleep in the buggy seat.

The boat George made would have been much better if he had had good lumber, but to make it from old board and scraps he picked up around the farm made the project difficult. However, he made it hold quite well by caulking the cracks with pieces of old cloth.

Even though the boat was less of a challenge than the homemade gun, he put it together.

For the gun barrel he used a piece of iron pipe about two feet long, with an inside diameter of three-eighths or one-half inch, which he was lucky to find in a town where no gas or water pipes were yet in use. He melted zinc from an old worn out wash board and molded a plug in the back end of the barrel. He had first tried a plug of lead, but it disintegrated with two or three shots. The zinc, having a higher melting point, was quite satisfactory. A wood plug was driven into the barrel first, to the point where the zinc could be poured in from the rear against the wood to make the right size metal plug; then later the wood was bored out

with a small rod from the muzzle. He battered in the back end of the pipe enough to prevent the plug from blowing out.

George whittled the gun stock out of a piece of wood and designed a breech-block. This he made of wood and covered with sheet metal. He used a long slender nail for a firing pin to go through the breech-block. He then bored out a recess in the zinc plug, into which he fitted a shotgun primer, and arranged a device to prevent the primer from blowing out backward. Finally the hammer was attached, using an outside coil spring to activate it.

It was an ingenious gun, and it worked! George, then a boy of fifteen knew enough to play safe to avoid getting hurt in case the gun should blow up the first time he tried firing it. To make sure the gun was safe, before shooting it from his shoulder, he placed it behind a stone wall, weighted it down and fired it a few times from the safety of the opposite side of the wall by pulling a string attached to the trigger.

As a result, George had for himself a dandy little economical muzzle loader. He used it to bag many rabbits at short range. Five cents worth of shot or powder made many loads.

An interesting sidelight on the boy's character is reflected in an incident that happened one day when he went to Bushnell's Hardware Store to buy a nickel's worth of shot. In browsing through the store, looking at so many other things he wanted and couldn't afford to buy, he forgot to pay for the shot. It was only after he got home that he remembered, so he rode his bike all the way to town, about four miles away, to pay the five cents to the hardware man.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Times Get Better on the Farm

Their new home on the Woods place was more convenient to school for George and his brothers than before. Fairview School, which served as the community center as well as classroom for the young people, was adjacent to one corner of the Pepperdine farm, about a half-mile from the house.

George attended there from 1898 to 1903. He did well in his studies, but was so busy with farm work, chores and his rabbit traps that he didn't become close socially to other students. His favorite friend in the school was Clyde Pittenger and several years after George left the farm he returned to visit his old friends and found that Clyde was then teaching school at Fairview. In their school days George was often the winner in the Friday afternoon "spelldown," while Clyde was usually the winner in the "ciphering match."

Fairview School also served as a meeting place for various religious occasions. The most exciting event for young George was a debate. On one side was P. W. Shick, a stalwart old-time preacher of the Churches of Christ, who was more than seventy years of age at the time. On the other side was a Mormon elder. Mr. Shick insisted that the Mor-

mons send to Salt Lake City and get "the best man possible" for the debate.

"If I whip him," the old preacher reasoned, "I want to whip the greatest apostle or prophet they have, and if I must be skinned, I want it to be done with a sharp tool."

George was not old enough to understand much about the points argued, but he did remember it as a hot battle. As to who was "skinned," the outcome was like that of many religious debates — both sides claimed "a glorious victory for truth."

With the dawn of the 20th century, economic times got better for Kansas farmers and even some of the new inventions of that great era of invention began to make their way into these remote communities. Residents of the area had seen advertisements of the Victor talking machine, which showed a dog looking into a big bell-shaped horn, with the title, "His Master's Voice," but few of them could really believe that the machine could talk.

Grandpa Terwilliger, grandfather of one of George's classmates at Fairview, became so enthused about the new "contraption" that he sent in an order for one. When it came he invited all the neighbors to the school house for a demonstration of the great invention.

As enthusiastic as a little boy with his first bicycle, old Grandpa Terwilliger made a great production of affixing one of the cylinder type records on the machine and then cranking it up and turning it on. It "talked" all right but the few songs, squeaky music and few spoken words were all intermingled with squawks, scratches and harsh grating sounds. The concensus among the neighbors who had come to hear "the thing" was that Grandpa had wasted his money and that the new plaything would never amount to "a hill of beans."

For some years the teacher at Fairview School had been a man. Mr. Searcy was rather exacting and stern in his

control of the children, so it was quite a departure when he was replaced in 1901-1903 by a beautiful young lady, Miss Lulu Butts. A resident of Mound Valley, Miss Butts was a sister of Mrs. Bates McGinnis, who lived on a farm adjoining the Pepperdines. George, who was then about fifteen, liked the new teacher better than her severe predecessor and studied hard to make excellent grades. Later he admitted that her influence caused him to work more willingly and get more out of his lessons than ever before. Theirs was a mutual admiration — the teacher calling him her "star pupil" and George crediting her with his rapid scholastic progress. George's teen years in school not only became more interesting but things on the farm likewise improved.

One day in the early spring of 1900, when George was nearly fourteen, his father said unexpectedly, "Son, when old Molly has her colt this spring, I'm going to give it to you."

"You mean for my very own, Daddy?" the incredulous boy said.

"Yes, for your very own. You'll have to take care of the colt and break it in to work when it's old enough, the same as Fred has done with the colts I gave him."

"I'll sure do that," the youth promised earnestly.

In spite of John's assurance that the colt was not due to be born for several weeks, George's eagerness and impatience was almost unbearable to him. Every morning he ran to the stables to see if old Molly's colt had arrived. Great was his joy, therefore, when after a seemingly interminable wait, old Molly presented him with a beautiful sorrel mare colt with a white stripe down her face.

The boy devoted every spare moment to the new arrival, who responded to its master's affections by following him about the place like a dog. A whistle would bring her running to his side, where she would affectionately thrust her velvet nose against George's face.

One day near tragedy struck. The colt, active and inquisitive, attempted to get through a barbed wire fence and became helplessly entangled in the cruel strands. When George found his pet she was bleeding profusely from deep cuts on her fore legs and chest. With a painful catch in his throat, the lad ran to his father, who quickly released the colt. For weeks George doctored the injured animal, spending as much time as possible with her in the barn. Touched by his son's devotion to the colt, John promised he would have another one next year so that he would have a team.

John gave his son the second colt the following spring. It was a little black animal, named Prince. George never tired of watching them grow and in breaking them to ride and to work in harness.

Times indeed were much better for George and for the family.

Mary loved the Woods place. The house was two-stories with eight rooms. It offered the first opportunity of her life to fix a real "parlor" with new carpet and furniture.

Within a few years the place blossomed out with new paint on the house, a new barn, and a flower garden. The tall weeds were all cut down, the hedge rows and orchard underbrush were all cleaned out. Mary planted rose bushes. With all this improvement, together with vigorously growing fields, well-groomed animals and white faced Hereford cattle, the Pepperdines had the most beautiful farm and home for miles around. Along with the fine poultry around the barnyard, they had peacocks with the spectacular spreading tails of brilliant colors and shrill voices adding to the glamour and charm of the place.

As soon as prosperity became evident, John told Mary it was time they could afford some things she had always wanted. They bought her a gold wedding ring to replace the plain silver ring she had worn so long. They bought her a gold watch with a long gold chain to go around

her neck and an attachment to fasten to her dress up near the shoulder, where ladies were wearing their watches in those days. Mary thought this new jewelry was the prettiest she had ever seen.

The family also enjoyed some "labor saving" devices such as riding plows and cultivators, a new buggy, a revolving barrel-type churn and ice cream freezer. However, at that time there still were no such luxuries as electrical appliances for electric power had not yet reached the rural districts. Tractors and other power-driven farm machinery were not even dreamed of in those days.

Soon after the Pepperdines bought the Woods place they built a larger new barn, the finest in the neighborhood and admired by people from miles around. John had wanted such a barn for years, but could not afford it up to this time. He wanted it to serve as a general utility building. It contained three large grain bins, one each for corn, oats and wheat, and had stalls for six horses, a large hay loft on all the upper floor and a large lean-to machinery shed on the side away from the house.

John built his barn at the edge of the hill about 200 feet from the house. It was attractive in appearance, painted red with white trim. There was a handsome cupola in the center of the top ridge of the roof, with slat sides to ventilate the interior. George and Ben had many hours of fun playing in the hayloft and climbing into the cupola, where they could get a good view all around the countryside. The barn doors were cut in two, horizontally, about four feet high, so that the upper half could be opened to help with ventilation.

One unique feature of the barn was the wood floor under the horses. Most barns had only dirt, gravel or clay floors for the animals, but John put in a floor of hard-pine planks so he could "bed down" the horses with straw or hay and later clean out the stalls easily as often as neces-

sary. Some neighbors thought it was absurd to put a wood floor under the horses — that it was "too fancy" for Old Dobbin and that it would be too hard for them to stand on. They also predicted that the planks would soon rot and weaken so that the horses would break through and get hurt. But John had ideas of his own from experience in Illinois, where he knew of plank floors that were in good condition after fourteen years of service.

These floors were a delight to Fred who enjoyed keeping the barn clean and the horses spic-and-span, while it was George's duty to give more attention to milking cows, feeding calves, pigs and chickens and bringing in firewood and kindling.

It was sad, then, that after only five years of building up a beautiful farm program and home, the Pepperdines found it necessary to give it all up for a new way of life.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Move to Town

Rural life as George had known it up to 1903 was drawing to a close. There were two primary reasons — his father's health and John's wish to further the education of his boys.

John was fifty years of age and not in very good health. The hard farm work, the passage of time and some weakening ailments had taken their toll on his powerful frame and he found it becoming more and more difficult to keep up the demanding pace on the farm, even though his sons were now old enough and big enough to perform much of the heavy labor. While this alone might not have caused him to retire from farm work, his desire to give his sons the advantage of further education was the deciding factor.

Since there was no high school convenient to the farm, the boys would have no opportunity to advance beyond the elementary grades unless they either left home or the family sold the farm and moved nearer to a place where they could secure the necessary training John desired for them.

The parents pondered the problem for a long time. John insisted, and Mary agreed, that he didn't want his sons to grow up to be, as he put it, "clod-hoppers." Further schooling meant, then, that with John unable to manage the farm work alone (Ben was then only twelve), there seemed to be no alternative but to sell the farm and move to a town where adequate education facilities were available.

There were many fireside family discussions about the

future of the boys, their education and what kind of careers would be best for them.

"I think George could go to law school," John said once, "and become a good lawyer like his Uncle George."

John's brother, George, had gone to law school in Chicago — a poor lad who had to wear overalls to class — and managed to come out next to the top of his class and then go on to become a successful attorney.

But Mary didn't like that prospect. "I don't want any boy of mine to be a lawyer," she protested. "I have heard people say many times that it is impossible for a man to be fully honest and be a successful lawyer at the same time — that he must be crooked sometimes in order to win his case."

John thought that logic would not fit every man, especially his brother George, but Mary was so insistent in her opposition to that career for her middle boy that he didn't press the point.

Then the question came up as to how they would earn a living in a town. John had been a very successful farmer, especially during the last five years, but he admitted that he knew nothing of the problems of business in town. It was finally decided that he would try his hand at construction.

In considering a possible place to locate, more and more of Parsons, Kansas, a prosperous and growing railroad town, was favored. Two factors made it attractive to the Pepperdines. In the first place, it was a railroad division point, with a population of seven or eight thousand people. Many of the residents were employed by the railroad and thus there were large numbers of potential house renters. That is what gave John the idea that he might put up a few small houses for rental purposes. Secondly, there was the Parsons Business College. Fred, then twenty-two, and George, seventeen, had received catalogs from this insti-

tution and had repeatedly expressed a desire to take business training there.

After a thorough discussion, it was decided that Parsons was the best place to settle. Now it remained only to sell the farm, livestock and equipment. In November of 1903, after the crops were harvested, a public auction was held and everything on the farm except the household goods went under the auctioneer's hammer. Improvements which John and his sons had made on the place were reflected in the sale price which was very satisfactory.

George's team of young horses was old along with all the other things. John put George's money from this sale aside.

"When you are twenty-one, George, I'll give you this $360 to use as you like," his father told him.

With the sale over, the momentous day arrived for the move to Parsons. Household goods were loaded on the wagon and the Pepperdines set forth. John had rented a small house in which to live until he found property which suited his needs for a home of their own. The trip from the farm to Parsons, about eighteen miles away, took all day and it was long after dark when the wagon arrived.

To Fred, George and Ben the town, with its gas street lights and busy thoroughfares, appeared a bewildering metropolis. The boys had been there only once before, to attend a Fourth of July celebration, and on that occasion Parsons had appeared alien and unfriendly. Now that they were coming here to live, they regarded it with new eyes and immediately felt a proprietorial pride in the place. On Broadway they saw two buildings, the tallest in town, which were three stories high! They were the tallest buildings the boys had ever seen.

John, who was driving the team, finally pulled up before a small house.

"Well, here we are," he announced.

With a rising sense of excitement, George and the others made their way into the dwelling. As the boy entered the door, he became strangely aware that a new phase of his life was beginning.

The Pepperdines lost little time in settling into town life. Although Parsons was, to them, a large and bustling place, in actuality it was a friendly country town and before long its strangeness wore off for them.

Soon they found much in the new environment to engage the attention of each member of the family. Without delay, they looked for the Church of Christ congregation and John, Mary and Fred placed their membership with the group. The small church was a friendly group of farmers and townspeople who warmly welcomed the new family. Within a few months, in May of 1904, George became a member of the church. From that time on, religion was a serious and weighty matter with him.

Meanwhile, John began his search for lots on which to build some rental houses. Shortly, having found a property which suited his purposes, he negotiated for its purchase and was soon deep in the construction of three housing units.

For Fred and George, the most immediate concern after moving was to begin their schooling. Accompanied by their father, they eagerly sought out the Parsons Business College. The trio was directed to Broadway, where they found the commercial school housed in upstairs rooms over some stores. The boys waited awkwardly while John inquired of a young woman about the possibility of his sons entering the college.

"If you'll wait a moment," she said with a bright smile, "I'll see if Mr. Olson, the president, is in his office. He'll be able to answer your questions."

Shortly she returned, followed by a handsome man, immaculately dressed, and wearing a dazzling smile.

Advancing with hand held out, he said heartily, "Welcome to Parsons Business College, sir. I'm President J. C. Olson. My secretary tells me you are interested in having your sons enter our fine institution."

John, a little overwhelmed by the effusiveness of the man, took his hand.

"Yes, President Olson," he said, "my boys are interested. I'm John Pepperdine and these are my sons, Fred and George."

From the man's looks and cultured manner, John harbored just the least fear that they were about to be taken in by a "city slicker." But he pushed his fear aside and told himself that the professor must know the school business.

Mr. Olson beamed upon the boys in greeting them — probably as green a pair of country boys as ever entered his school.

George, in shaking the president's hand, thought in admiration that he had never seen any man dressed to look more like a picture in a magazine.

"Well, Mr. Pepperdine, you have certainly come to the right place," President Olson assured him after the amenities were taken care of. "If your young men want to become successful in the business world, we have just the training they need. I have a sort of unofficial motto for our institution — 'Parsons' graduates reach the top first.' But, come on into my office and we can map out your classes."

For Fred and George this had been planned as merely a tentative visit to help them decide if they wanted to go to business college. But, almost before they knew it, they were swept along by Mr. Olson's enthusiasm and charm, and soon found themselves committed to a course of study. Their class schedule included bookkeeping, English, arithmetic, commercial law and office management. With tantalizing visions of becoming successful business men, the

youths enrolled on the spot and the following day began their class work.

Although George found his school work interesting, he regarded some of the subjects with special interest. In one of these, business training, the college used an ingenious method of teaching. The student bought and sold units of wheat, oats, corn and other commodities from the market listings, which were posted each day. These commodities were printed on cards and the students paid for the imaginary purchases by checks on the college "bank."

Students were warned not to draw over a stated amount from their imaginary bank account. The system was devised primarily as an exercise in bookkeeping, and little attention was given to loss or gain except for the correct recording of it. However, an incidental knowledge was gained in observing the commodity market operations and trends, and, human nature being what it is, George was always pleased when his fictitious purchases and sales showed a profit.

George also found the penmanship course valuable. Until then he had used a crabbed movement of the fingers which produced an angular stilted handwriting. At the school the penmanship system was the Palmer method, which was based on a free movement of the arm. The new skill was invaluable when he took up shorthand, which he shortly did.

Throughout the remainder of his life, George Pepperdine made good use of his shorthand. Although he worked for only four or five years at stenographic jobs after finishing his business college course, he found shorthand useful later for making memos, taking down notes on speeches and sermons and in writing articles and speeches of his own before typing them in final form.

George soon met friends of his own age among the young people of the church group. In the congregation was Mr. Isaac Robertson, whose family took an active part in

the work of the little church. Mr. Robertson had four sons, some of them near George's age. It was also in the Robertson home that he met a young lady, Lena Rose Baker, who was to become of considerably more than a passing interest for the young man.

Among his other new found friends were the sons of Martin Davis-Otis, Oren and Ernest. The Davis boys and Fred and George occasionally would go out into the country on rabbit hunts and the Davis brothers introduced the Pepperdine boys to squirrel hunting. There had been no squirrels where George grew up, but eastward from Parsons on the Niosho River were timbered areas where the red fox squirrel abounded. The sport of hunting this cagey quarry became a favorite sport of George and his friends, and they often returned from these outings with several of these animals which were such tasty food.

The move to Parsons exposed young George to a subject which had been virtually foreign to him up to that time. That was the subject of strong drink and it was one that never in his lifetime gained the slightest bit of sympathy from him. He remained to teetotaler throughout his life and could never be persuaded to take the first drink.

During the early part of this century and earlier, Kansas was noted for its stand against liquor. The famous Carrie Nation, with her busy hatchet, had many admirers here who were rabid against "Demon Rum" in any form. The Pepperdines had heard very little in the rural districts about liquor and the clamor for prohibition, but after they moved to Parsons, where there were some "wets" and bootlegging activity, they learned that "decent people" strictly avoided certain stores and restaurants.

There were three drug stores in the town in those days. One was known to be "safe," even for ladies to patronize, but it was whispered that the other two were "dives" and that thirsty men and evil storekeepers connived to break

the law and deal in the "foul stuff." It was reported that certain men were seen to leave these places slightly inebriated and they were blacklisted in polite society.

Ordinarily a very patient man, George had very little sympathy during his life with the person who would "waste his money, dull his reasoning power, injure his health, character and reputation by drinking alcoholic beverages," to which George frequently would add: "You couldn't force a dog or a hog in Kansas to drink." And he always had at his fingertips the amazing statistics of the amount of money Americans spent on alcoholic beverages and the percentage of accidents and deaths caused by persons under its influence. He went so far as to call the use of liquor "mankind's deadliest scourge" and "the greatest of our national scandals." He was greatly elated with the passage of the 18th Amendment and the coming of Prohibition in 1920 and was sorely disappointed with the lack of enforcement and finally the repeal of the Amendment.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

George Strikes Out on His Own

The year 1905 was an important one in several respects for nineteen-year-old George. That year he graduated from Parsons Business College, got his first job, saw his first automobile and went away from home for his first job.

Shortly after completing his training at the business school, George took his first job with the local gas company, at six dollars a week. The launching of his business career was prosaic enough, for it was only part time work. His duties were to take dictation and write a few letters each day and make out statements for the customers for their gas bills. The office was small, but adequate for the tiny staff, which consisted of George and the manager and another young man who kept the books and acted as cashier.

It was that same year that George saw his first automobile, the first one to appear on the streets of Parsons. Ironically enough, in light of his later activities, pictures of the contraption which he had seen in magazines up to that time had aroused very little interest for young George. This was not surprising, however, for while some people were predicting that the machine would someday replace the horse and buggy, no one in the rural districts or small towns really took that kind of wild prediction seriously.

George was greatly impressed when he saw his first auto. The appearance of the car, belonging to Mr. Steele,

who owned a hardware store in Parsons, created quite a sensation throughout the town. When George saw the car travelling down the street he gave chase on his bicycle. He was rapidly losing ground until the auto reached the end of the graveled street at the edge of town and the owner stopped to turn around. Then George had an opportunity to get a close view of the strange machine. The car was called the Orient Buckboard and had the appearance of four bicycle wheels on a light frame. There was a seat for two people. The engine, a one-cylinder affair, was mounted over the rear axle. It was a frail looking vehicle, but George was favorably impressed with its speed on the smooth street, although he was dubious of its utility on mud roads. It was to be a few years before this horseless carriage would become such an important part of George Pepperdine's life.

Meanwhile, in the fall of 1905, a request came to the Parsons Business College, which acted as an employment office for its graduates, for a young man to do stenographic work at Checotah, Oklahoma. Notified of the opening by the school, George eagerly accepted the offer, which came from Lafayette Brothers, operators of a general store, grain elevator and a cotton gin in the little Oklahoma town.

Feeling like a real adventurer, he set off for Oklahoma. His enthusiasm was somewhat dampened when he arrived in the little town, located in the eastern part of the state. He felt like an alien in a foreign land and soon was miserably homesick.

George took to his tasks well enough. His boss, Ben F. Lafayette, was grand master of the I.O.O.F. Lodge for Oklahoma, and much of the correspondence George was helping him with was in connection with the business of the Odd Fellows Lodge. George stuck to it for two months and when his homesickness showed no signs of disappearing his unhappiness began to reflect in his letters home. John

quietly made inquiries in Parsons to see about job opportunities for his son.

In talking with James Powers, the owner of a plumbing shop which had done the plumbing for John's new houses, he learned the businessman needed a bookkeeper and bill collector. He told John to tell his boy he could have the job at $40 a month, a good salary in those days. The letter informing him about the job was most welcome to George, although his current pay was $50 a month. He gave his notice to Lafayette Brothers and headed back home.

George liked his work for Mr. Powers and he worked at it diligently for several months. He knew there was little future in the job or, for that matter, not many opportunities for a worthwhile future in Parsons at all. Restless, spurred by a desire to make a success of his life — yet already aware that being away from home was not the happiest life for him — George had reached a difficult period. Finally, though, the desire to succeed won out and he began to inquire around for a place of greater promise than Parsons, Kansas. Through the agency of the Underwood Typewriter Company, whose machines George could operate, he learned there were many calls in Kansas City for young men who had stenographic and bookkeeping training.

Enticed by the wider opportunities offered, George finally decided in the late summer of 1906 to try his luck in the big city. Kansas City, Missouri, was a far cry from Parsons and seemed very large and bustling and confusing to the country boy.

Through the typewriter company's employment service, he had no difficulty securing work. His first job was with Truette & Company, a large real estate office on Ninth Street. The firm handled the rentals on a great many properties and George helped with the bookkeeping and collections. His salary was ten dollars a week, five of which went for room and board.

He soon located the Church of Christ as a place of worship. However, the city still seemed like a strange and lonesome place and within two months he was so homesick that he once again departed for Parsons and home.

Back home, George found his parents in a similar state of unrest. They still were not happy with town life and, with Fred now gone away to work, they were trying to figure out some way to return to the land.

"I was born and raised on the soil and I'm not at home anywhere else," declared John Pepperdine.

"What kind of farm did you have in mind," George asked.

"A little place — where we can raise a garden and chickens. Maybe some turkeys and pigs, and have a good cow."

"And some fruit trees," Mary added.

"Yes, and some fruit trees," her husband agreed.

John found the little farm he wanted early in 1907, near the village of Dennis, nine miles west of Parsons.

George was still in a quandary. Like his dad, he was also born and raised on the soil, but, unlike his father, he knew this type of life would not always be for him. Yet, paradoxically, his experience had shown him that he was not happy away from his home. Adding to his problem, George knew he wasn't really needed on that small place. After a few weeks of unhappy, aimless casting about for something to do on the farm, he finally decided he'd raise chickens — in a big way. He had been reading articles in magazines and poultry journals which painted glowing pictures of the profits to be made in such a venture.

So, George built a chicken house and purchased an incubator, two brooders and hatching eggs. Soon the small structure resounded to the shrill piping voices of a thousand baby chicks. George, excited by now with visions of a good profit, busily tended his noisy brood and waited

for warm spring days to release them from the chicken house. But the sun refused to shine and the clouds brought rain, rain and more rain. Packed in the little shelter, damp and cold, the chicks began to die. Even the warmth of the brooders was not enough to equal the needed sunshine and fresh air. Sadly, each morning George counted the dead chicks. One hundred died. Then two hundred, three, four — eventually he had only about two hundred chickens left. This costly failure ended his interest in the poultry business.

By this time it was the summer of 1907 and George Pepperdine had now reached the age of 21.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Wedding Bells for George and Lena

Upon coming of age, George seemed to find new courage to once again go out into the world to seek his fortune. After the unfortunate chicken-raising experience he remained in his parents home for a few weeks, trying to decide his next move.

There simply was nothing very challenging available in Parsons. The only alternative seemed to be a return to Kansas City.

Another factor in his decision involved the young lady mentioned earlier, whom he had met at the church in Parsons.

Lena Rose Baker, whose home was in Mound Valley, was a niece of Isaac Robertson and a cousin of the four Robertson boys with whom George spent much of his time. Although she and George had come from the same little community, he scarcely knew her until he met her at the Robertsons.

Their courtship was brief and had not reached the stage in the summer of 1907, of anything like an understanding between them, although George very definitely was thinking in terms of marriage. However, when George once again left for Kansas City that summer, they promised

to write to one another, and the correspondence increased the interest in each other.

In Kansas City once again, George secured a job in the office of the Equitable Life Assurance Society. His position was as a stenographer and it was one which demanded more speed and skill in shorthand and typing than he possessed. He could have held the job, but it would have been with difficulty. Therefore, through an employment agency, he found a post more to his liking.

The new job, bookkeeping and general office work, was with the Southside Garage at 33rd and Troost Avenue. The garage was a large establishment for those early days of the new automobile. Not only were cars stored and repaired here but in the basement tires were vulcanized and treads were made. These treads were curious affairs made of leather and metal studs, cemented over the tire to save wear on the rubber treads which, by today's standards, were extremely susceptible to damage from rocks and ordinary usage.

George was utterly fascinated with the garage and especially the work of the mechanics. He spent his spare moments in the repair section. Satisfied at first to merely watch the workmen go about their mysterious tasks on motor repairs, he soon was asking questions, especially in the tire repair department.

His interest in the automobile was mounting rapidly. He would have loved to have one, but, of course, he couldn't afford it. Every chance he got he took a ride in a car to learn more about these intriguing machines.

Happy with his work, which was stimulated by the good salary of $12 a week, George decided he was well on his way to overcoming his homesickness which had plagued him previously. Considering his job to be permanent and dependable, he made up his mind to carry out his plans to get married. Lena Rose accepted his proposal and agreed

to come to Kansas City to become his wife. Then, in a quiet ceremony witnessed by friends, the two young people were joined as man and wife on October 17, 1907.

They settled down to housekeeping. Their first home was in upstairs rented rooms for which they paid $8 a month. John, as mentioned earlier, had put away the money from the sale of George's team of horses and harness. He sent 'this sum, $360, to George to buy furniture and other household supplies, also George's employer gave him an immediate raise to $15 a week.

Just two days later, a bombshell dropped which put George's integrity to the test, and in what to most people would have been a small matter, created a crisis that threatened his job.

His employer owed many bills and on this day of the crisis, he told his young employee that when certain collectors called on the telephone, to say that the boss was out. This request did not coincide at all with George's home training and his sense of what was honest. To have carried out that order would have been, to George, to tell a lie.

After a moment of confusion and with a very red face, George replied: "I won't do that, unless you are really out. I'll tell them you said you were out."

The man faced him in surprise, his face reflecting his anger. "You can either do what I tell you to do, or you can quit."

George was on the point of quitting at once, but he was in a most difficult position. Just two days married and on the verge of being without a job; this was a real dilemma!

At lunch time he telephoned the man he knew at the employment agency and explained the situation to him.

"Why do you waver at all?" the man said. "You know in your own mind what is right — go ahead and do it."

That was all George needed. "Yes, you're right."

Squaring his shoulders, he turned and marched back to the garage. Facing his boss, he announced: "I'm going to quit. I won't do what you want me to do and won't tell a lie for anybody."

To his surprise, his employer's whole demeanor changed. With an expression which reflected shame, the man replied, "George, you stay right here. I don't want you to quit. If there's any white-lying to do, I'll do it myself."

Greatly relieved, and with a new self-respect, George returned to his desk.

The happy weeks slipped by for the newlyweds and soon 1907 passed into a new year.

In the early months of 1908 George and Lena, becoming cramped in the upstairs rooms, found a small cottage on 31st Street and rented it for $17 a month. Soon they formed friendships at the Church of Christ, some that were to last for many years. Among the group were Mae Blunt and Orville Pound. These two, leaders among the younger set of the church, were married in 1907 and George and Lena saw a great deal of them. Many years later Orville became an employee and then an executive in George's business.

George's job continued to be interesting for him and he was being paid a fair salary, but he found it impossible to save anything out of the $15 a week. His whole nature and training rebelled against just getting by. He began to think even more seriously about his future. He found himself thinking about a better job or some way he could earn extra money on the side.

One experiment he tried was a dismal failure. He tried to make leather treads with metal studs for bicycle tires, similar to the type of treads his employer made for auto tires. He did the work on the experimental bike treads in the basement of his home, working long evenings. The sample treads looked quite nice. They were made of very

thin leather and small light-weight studs. They were firmly glued on, making a sturdy, serviceable tire. The trouble was, they were too heavy to be practical for bicycles.

Undaunted, George Pepperdine continued to wrack his fertile brain for the "big idea" that would lead to success. His thoughts continued to return to something which could fulfill a need not now being filled in the fledgling auto industry.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Five Dollars and an Idea

George Pepperdine suddenly stared, intrigued, at the catalog in his hand. He looked at his desk where several other catalogs and circulars from wholesalers and manufacturers lay. They advertised automobile parts, tires and accessories.

Maybe this was it! He had been sitting here right on top of an idea all summer and fall of 1908 and now . . .

George began to get excited, his mind began to spin as he worked it out in his imagination.

All that summer and fall George had worried with his need to better his lot, how to secure a better paying job, get some extra work on the side to earn more salary or get into some business which could be started without capital. As a bookkeeper in the garage, he made many contacts. His interest had been greatly aroused by the automobile. Somewhere in this field he searched for his own future.

In the mail which came to his office at the garage, all of which passed through George's hands, were the circulars and catalogs from the wholesale houses and manufacturers. He kept going back to these, fascinated by their utility as well as their sales potential in the growing market.

At this time cars were coming from the factory without

equipment. Anyone buying a new car had to buy a top, windshield, bumpers, speedometer, kerosene side and tail lamps, spare tires, jack, tire pump and assorted other things or drive without such equipment. Some cars came without even the "honker" bulb horns, gas head lamps and carbide gas generators.

George felt certain that a store selling such equipment could do a good business. From his contacts he knew that there was only one little store in Kansas City which handled a limited department devoted to auto equipment, handled on a wholesale basis to supply garages.

Alas, George was painfully aware that it would take a great deal of money to stock and open a store and he didn't have a fraction of the capital it would take.

There were not many garages in Kansas City at this time, although it was a large metropolitan community, but automobiles were becoming more numerous each year. George felt sure that in a matter of time there would be hundreds of the machines on the streets. Some people even then were making wild predictions that eventually one person in twenty would own one of the contraptions! George was even more optimistic than that for he had the feeling that the auto would be improved, made more dependable, more economical and better equipped.

Equipment! That, he knew, was the magic word. Retail, retail, retail! He couldn't get it out of his mind. He knew the need was there. How could he open up a store?

"I believe the automobile is here to stay," he told Lena one night.

Of course it wasn't the first time he'd said that, but he went on: "I believe that some day it will be a tremendous industry and the auto supply business would make us a good living if I could open up a store here in Kansas City."

"It takes money to open a store, George," she reminded him.

George sighed. "Yes, I know — that's the pinch. If I had some capital I'd get in on the ground floor and grow with the automobile business."

Lena tried to discourage him. "You've a good job. You might as well forget the auto business. Look how much money and time you wasted on the leather treads for bicycle tires."

"It wasn't a waste," was George's attitude. "It was a good experience. At least I tried it and found it wasn't profitable."

Then he went on doggedly: "Just the same, there's money to be made in the auto supply business if I can figure a way to get into it."

"I guess you're right, but it takes capital," Lena reminded again.

But George was determined. "I'll keep thinking about it — maybe I can find a way."

Over his ledger, at lunch and late into the night he worried over the challenge. He studied the intriguing circulars and catalogs. He sent to New York and Chicago for more. He poured over the listings and his great longing was stimulated as he saw improved and new things offered for sale. His sense of frustration was exceeded by only one stronger emotion — determination to somehow get into the automobile supply business . . .

The catalog in his hand trembled in his excitement. Wholesale? His mind whirled. Retail. The bridge between those pictured items in the book and the auto owner. A retail store? Of course. But was there any other way? In his desperation the idea hit him like a bolt of lightning. Mail order!

George thought of the thousands of auto owners on farms and in small towns throughout the central states where there were no auto supply stores or garages. Couldn't he, by mail, reach this sizeable and growing market? Why

not? And it might not even require any capital — or very little! George was really excited now.

To start, he could make a circular similar to those mailed out from the wholesale companies. He would offer merchandise on a cash basis and buy the items from the wholesale houses after his orders came in.

George lost no time once he hit upon his big idea. He investigated and found that the wholesale machinery house with which the garage did business would sell him supplies at a discount if he started a business. He checked with various tire manufacturers — Goodrich, Goodyear, Firestone and Ajax. They, too, were willing to sell to him their products at a discount.

He explained his big idea to Lena. To his delight she was enthusiastic about it. Encouraged by her support and the willingness of the manufacturers and wholesalers to cooperate, George then went to a printer who did work for the garage and told him in detail what he had in mind.

George's enthusiasm was so contagious that the printer agreed to run off 500 circulars on credit. George laid out his listings and soon they were off the press — plain price lists, without any illustrations. Now he was ready for the big venture.

He took five dollars from the family budget to buy 500 one-cent stamps. He and Lena folded and addressed the circulars, which quoted standard merchandise at reduced prices.

Standing before the mail chute, George, with a feeling of finality and a little prayer for success, fed them into the slot. Little did he realize at that moment that he, a green farmer boy under 23 years of age, had just pulled the trigger and fired the first shot there in Kansas City in March, 1909, which would eventually resound from coast to coast in the development of a successful multi-millon dollar chain of stores employing several thousand people.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Birth of Western Auto

Many years after that eventful March of 1909 a national magazine ran a story entitled, "How $5 and an Idea Built a Multi-Million Dollar Business." It was about George Pepperdine and Western Auto Supply Company. And the five dollars referred to start the story was the amount invested in the first 500 one-cent stamps. Everything else needed to start the mail order business was bought on credit, even to the typewriter used to answer the correspondence. The one word "credit" turned out to be the solution to the big question that had bothered George so long, "what can we use for capital?"

But success did not come overnight. For a good many days after George mailed the 500 circulars there was not a single reply, and George went about with ill-suppressed impatience. He would hurry home each evening and, in a hopeful voice, inquire: "Any mail today?"

Finally one day, when it seemed that the invariable answer would never change, Lena held up a letter. With excitement George examined it, and saw it was postmarked Alva, Oklahoma. He tore open the envelope, his hands shaking so that he could hardly extract the contents. He finally got it out. As he unfolded the paper out fell a money order. Eagerly he scanned the letter which was an order for a brass kerosene tail lamp. He picked up the money order. It was for $1.90.

George was pleased far beyond the amount of the check. He held up the letter and with a note of incredulity announced: "I have my first order. I'm in business."

Lena smiled happily, but replied teasingly, "One order doesn't make a business."

"No, but I'll get others — just wait and see."

He handed the letter to his wife and returned to the present.

"Only trouble is," he said ruefully, "I don't think this item is carried in stock here in Kansas City."

"What'll you do?"

"I'll order it from New York by express."

"What will it cost you?" wondered his practical young wife.

George searched his price list. "It's $1.25 from the wholesale company. That's still 60 cents profit."

He paused. "Then there will be an express charge."

He laughed happily. "But even if I don't make a cent on this order, it's worth it."

After supper, which was eaten in an atmosphere of exhilaration, he ordered the tail lamp. In due time it arrived and when the charges had been paid, George, who had spent five cents in car fare each way to and from the express office, showed 20 cents profit on his very first order.

Meanwhile, before this order was filled, he was already deeply involved in the mail order business. The day following his first order, and even before he could voice his usual question, Lena gaily held up three letters, when he walked into the house. These orders were small ones, but they happily filled them and eagerly calculated their profits. Then the orders began to come in more rapidly. About 10 days after the first order, Lena, from a phone at the corner drug store called George at work.

"Hang onto your chair, George," she said, her voice excited. "An order has come in for $43.75."

What's it for," he inquired eagerly.

"Tires and some spark plugs and a few other little things."

"Wonderful! If we can get big orders like that for tires coming in regularly, we'll really make some money, even if our gross margin is only 15 per cent on tires."

"Hurry home after work," Lena said. "There are some other smaller orders, too."

George hurried.

The orders continued to come in steadily and George was finding it difficult to hold his job and take care of the growing business. He would handle his correspondence at night, but filling and shipping orders had to be done during business hours. Sometimes, if it was a tire order, he could phone the wholesaler and have the merchandise sent directly to the customer. Occasionally he was able to dash out on his lunch hour, pick up a small item and send it himself. At other times he was able to persuade a wholesaler to remain open a little past his normal closing hour to give George time to pick up and dispatch an order.

George's first month in business netted him $100. Not much, but still considerably more than his $15 a week salary. Elated with this success, he knew that in order to continue to operate the business he would have to give up his position at the garage.

By this time there were three members of the Pepperdine family. Their baby daughter, Florence, was then about four months old and their living expenses were higher than they had ever been. His wages weren't much, but at least they were steady and dependable. Even though orders had poured in beyond his expectations, would this continue? George thought it would. He could see that every month more and more automobiles were appearing on the streets. How could he go wrong?

One night on the way home from work he reached his

decision. He would resign from his job at the garage and, sink or swim, devote his whole energy to the mail order business. Next day he told his employer, Mr. Snow, about his decision.

"I think you are a very foolish young man," his boss said. "There's no profit in a mail order business. You'll be back soon begging for your old job."

"Maybe so," George admitted, "but I'm going to give it a try."

"Well, its your own funeral," Mr. Snow said. "You've done a good job here and when you find out how foolish you are — in about a month — drop around. We may have a job for you."

George was grateful for the compliment and left-handed promise of a job if he failed in business, and told Mr. Snow he was.

"It may be that I'm wrong," he went on, "but I'm going to give it everything I've got."

In addition to the negative attitude of George's employer and a few friends, there were numerous discouragements and frustrations, but he would not allow any of them to stop him or swerve him from his determination to give the mail order business a fair trial. Even George's father, whom he respected more than any other man in the world, thought the idea of selling supplies for these new gasoline buggies was "a sorry sort of business."

"Be careful," he advised George, "and if you do make a little money selling such goods, don't get several hundred dollars invested and tied up in parts and supplies for these new fangled machines because the bottom may drop out of the automobile business at any time and you might have worthless goods on hand."

George listened to such advice, but didn't accept it. He could understand his father's lack of faith because his father

had had no contact with automobiles. Up to that time, 1909, he had never ridden in an auto. The few cars he had seen around his town were of little practical use to their owners. They couldn't be used when the roads were deep in mud or frozen, and when they got out several miles from town, even on good roads, very often something went wrong and it became necessary to hire a farmer with a team of horses to tow the car back to town where it could be repaired. In fact, such machines were considered by John Pepperdine and others around the smaller towns as only a "rich man's plaything."

But George had faith in the future of the automobile and plowed ahead with all his might, even though "take home money" for his wife and baby was scarce and problems seemed to multiply. Despite all the negative advice and reverses, George doggedly refused to give up.

In April of 1909, immediately after he resigned his bookkeeping job, George decided he must have a place of business other than his home to handle his mail and shipping of orders. He felt it should be closer to downtown near the express office and freight yards. There was no Parcel Post in 1909. Furthermore, George felt that in addition to his mail order business, he should have a little place where local people could come in and get supplies. He knew that during the winter months, when country roads were frozen or deep in mud, the mail orders would dwindle to nothing. In Kansas City, which had some paved streets, cars were able to run most of the winter. Perhaps he could sell a little to these motorists.

With that in mind, he was able to negotiate with the Sterling Automobile Agency at 708 East 15th Street for a show window in which to display goods and a space about eight by twelve feet for a desk and a showcase. After buying a showcase, a desk and some necessary articles and paying a month's rent of $20, George had used nearly all the $100

of profit which he had earned from the first month of business. The wholesale company from which he had been buying, extended credit to George and supplied him with goods to display in his showcase and window.

George and Lena had discussed at great length a name for the new concern even before the first circulars were mailed. They decided on "Western Auto Supply Agency." George actually preferred the word "company" to agency, but his choice of the latter was typical of the character of the man. He felt that company implied a group of people; therefore, he didn't feel that he could truthfully use it. So he settled for "agency" as being by designation, a one-man operation he could honestly lay claim to. This strong sense of truth and honesty was a basic and enduring part of his nature which guided him throughout his life.

Not everyone he dealt with, George learned early in his career, was so guided. It was George's policy to sell strictly for cash, mainly because he had no capital with which to carry accounts. During the first summer in his little place of business, a customer who had been in several times for small items talked George into letting him have two clincher tires, worth something over $40, and to wait a few days for the money.

This customer operated a White Steamer in rental service. He couldn't run without tires and couldn't pay for the tires until he served a few more clients. He kept telling George day after day that he would pay him the money "tomorrow," but the right tomorrow never came. Soon the customer lost his car or sold it and George was never able to collect. That experience taught George a valuable lesson about doing credit business when he could not afford to take the risk. It also taught him that in order to sell goods at the lowest possible prices, he must sell for cash only, so that no allowance would have to be made in selling prices for credit losses.

At the same time George was installing his first little office in 1909, he exerted every effort to increase his mail order volume. New and improved folders were prepared, showing additional items for sale.

One difficult problem was to secure the names of car owners in the small towns to whom he could mail the price lists and folders. In those days there was no motor vehicle registration from which George could obtain addresses. He thought about the problem for some time and then came up with a solution both ingenious and successful.

He borrowed a Dunn & Bradstreet publication. From this he found the names and addresses of banks in every little town. He personally typed neat individual letters to bankers in each small town throughout Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma, enclosing a stamped return envelope and asked that the names of car owners in their localities be sent to him. This was probably the only such request the bankers had ever received and since there were but few cars in each town the bankers usually knew the names of those prominent and prosperous enough to own one.

The response was most gratifying and George soon had a list of some 2000 car owners, while apparently no one else had such a list. Thus, many of these owners, receiving his folders quoting standard items at low prices naturally ordered from him.

Ideas, the young man discovered, really paid off. At the end of 1909 the total sales for the first year of his venture amounted to $12,000. And that was before the advent of the Model T Ford (as far as George Pepperdine's business was concerned) in which was to lie a great volume of his business.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Growing Pains and Health Problems

At a time when working capital was non-existent and so desperately needed in launching the new business, it is difficult to imagine that George Pepperdine would refuse the offer of a friend to invest a little money in the project, but it happened!

Several weeks after George quit his bookkeeping job to give full time to the new mail order business, all the money earned from the first lot of orders had been used. Orders from the first lot of folders had fallen off to a trickle, and no orders could be expected from the new lot of folders until they could be completed and mailed.

It was at this time, George's weakest moment, that Mr. Hilton, a good friend of the family, made George an offer. Mr. Hilton, a middle aged railway passenger train conductor known to be an honest and conservative man, knew of the struggle George was having to get the business started on a shoestring. He came to George and said he was willing to risk his life's savings of $500 to help get the business started. He wanted half interest in return for what he considered — with good reason, of course — to be a very speculative investment. He pointed out that George had invested only $5 in addition to his time, which by comparison made the $500 look pretty substantial, and that if the

business should succeed he was willing for George to take out a salary before dividing the profits. If the business did not succeed, he agreed to stand all the loss of the investment.

George could see the logic of the offer and he appreciated it, but he only shook his head and said he would rather sink or swim alone. He also reasoned that, although the $500 would help him at a time when house rent and past due bills needed paying and his own family needs were increasing, it still would represent only a temporary measure. If the offer had been several thousand dollars, or enough to stock up a complete store with merchandise, he might have succumbed to the temptation, so no deal was made and George and Mr. Hilton continued to be good friends.

George did manage to pull through his fiscal dilemma. The second and third mailings of folders in the summer and fall of 1909 brought in more and better orders than the first mailing. The folders were prepared more attractively and mailed to a larger list of names. George thought he could begin to see a little daylight, but he was not yet on solid ground financially. He did not know how severe his trial would be during the first winter. He depended almost wholly on mail order business, which was almost nonexistent during that first winter. Sales in Kansas City were also very small, for only a few car owners knew about the little auto supply agency. His margin of profit from mail orders was slender, since the prices were quoted below the usual selling prices in order to attract buyers. After the printing bills, postage, rent and other incidental expenses were paid, he had scarcely enough money left for family needs.

Before the first winter was ended, he had run out of money. Thanks to the generosity of a fine personal friend, E. E. Norquist, he was saved from actual want. Mr. Norquist heard of George's financial woes and volunteered a loan of

$300. This allowed the struggling young business man to pay off outstanding bills and keep his head above water until good weather and new mail orders came again in the spring. Mr. Norquist himself was interested in cars and had bought a Metz "runabout" on the installment plan. That didn't mean what it does nowadays. He didn't pay for the car on a monthly credit plan; rather, he received the small lightweight machine in installments! In one shipment the frame arrived, then the wheels, the engine and the body, all in different deliveries. As the parts arrived one learned, by necessity, how to assemble a car. Mr. Norquist, to the amusement of his friends, assembled the parts in his basement and naturally had a difficult time getting the completed auto out of the cellar.

The year 1910 proved to be a better business year. George prepared some new folders, which were more complete and more inviting than before. They even had pictures showing some of the products listed for sale and the offering of items was larger.

That year a serious health problem hit the young man. In the early months of spring a tumor developed on the right side of his neck, and began to grow with alarming speed. Doctors he consulted in Kansas City advised an operation. Not having full confidence in strange surgeons, George decided to return to the family doctor at Mound Valley. The operation to remove the growth was performed there by Dr. Bennett and George was back at work within three weeks.

During his absence it had been necessary to have someone take care of the business. Fortunately, a good friend, Ben Weldon, who was working for the wholesale machinery house where George bought his goods and was familiar with automobile accessories, was able to handle it. Ben went to George's office each day, opened the mail, deposited the checks and filled the orders. Ben not only performed honestly and efficiently, he refused to take any pay for his

services. When the convalescent returned he found that the volume of orders had amounted to about a thousand dollars during his three week's absence.

With the return of summer and good weather, which meant good roads in rural districts, the orders poured in with the circulation of the improved folders. George was gratified with business, which about doubled the sales of 1909, and the year of 1910 showed a volume of about $22,000.

Feeling prosperous, this young man who had set his sights on making a success in an auto-related business but had never owned one himself decided that it was about time he bought a car of his own. During the fall of 1910 he paid $200 for an old Stevens--Duryea.

This machine was a rather strange looking vehicle. It was built like a buggy, with a two-cylinder engine under the seat, but had low wheels. There was room for two persons in the main seat. The front of the car, which was like the curved dashboard on a buggy, would let down and make a seat for two passengers over the front axle — a most precarious and uncomfortable position. George almost immediately found it unsatisfactory from almost every standpoint. He soon sold it and bought a two-cylinder Maxwell roadster, which turned out to be a very practical little car.

Growth of the business during 1911 continued to be most satisfying. George, always on the lookout for articles of customer appeal, prepared even more attractive folders and began to use two colors of ink and better illustrations. His sales in 1911 mounted to $46,000.

By the summer of that year he found the task of handling the business alone almost impossible, yet his margin of profit — small because of liberal discounts allowed to attract customers — left him little with which to hire the help he needed, but, again his health became a factor.

Coming home one evening in the spring of 1911 utterly exhausted, his appearance caused Lena to look at him searchingly.

"George," she said, "you're working too hard. You ought to hire some help."

He nodded. "Yes, I need someone to wrap and ship packages."

"Why don't you ask my brother Hal? He'll be a big help and won't expect a large salary."

Hal Baker was then '16. The Baker family, including all five of Lena's brothers, had recently moved to Kansas City from Mound Valley.

George brightened at her suggestion. "Do you think Hal would like such a job?"

"I'll ask him and find out."

"I could certainly use another pair of hands — or rather feet," George said. "Seems like I'm always on the run, picking up goods from the wholesale people, wrapping and shipping packages and writing letters."

Thus it was arranged that George's young brother-in-law would become a part of the growing business in 1911. He found the boy a great help. Hal was especially useful in running most of the errands. Becoming George's "extra feet," he shuttled between the office, the wholesale house and the express office. Hal was an energetic person and cheerfully performed his multitude of tasks, laughingly referring to his many trips on foot as "shagging."

Finding it necessary to fill an order for a pair of tires, he would set off with a joking call: "George, I'll shag the tires over here."

Hal wasn't the only member of Lena's family to eventually be involved in Western Auto. Two other brothers later worked for George in the business.

Hal's coming into the business proved advantageous when George's neck began to bother him again. The oper-

ation of the previous year hadn't been entirely successful and surgery was necessary again. This required a three-week stay in Mound Valley that summer.

During the winter of 1911-12, George prepared and had printed his first auto supply catalog, a great improvement over the folder in the development of the business. Not only did the book contain more items for sale but it had a permanence about it which the folders lacked. In short, the customers held on to the book and it became more or less a manual for car owners.

Returns from the catalog in increased orders were spectacular. George also secured the distributorship for Frontier Tires, which sold at attractive prices and gave a fair margin of profit. At year's end he found that his sales for 1912 had risen to $67,000.

That year also marked another important milestone for the young businessman. Having outgrown his little space on East 15th Street, George moved into new and enlarged quarters. He secured a store building at 1426 Grand Avenue from a friend, Charlie Poison. Charlie himself had opened up a retail auto supply store in 1911. His sales hadn't amounted to much, but Poison had purchased vulcanizing equipment and had gone into the production of inner liners and blow-out boots for tires. This venture had proven quite successful and instead of its being a mere sideline it had grown into a major project. Charlie needed more space. He wanted to sell his stock of accessories and move into the manufacturing district.

As usual, George was strapped from lack of capital and couldn't buy outright the merchandise and fixtures from Charlie, but he worked out a deal for installment payments and moved into the larger quarters in the fall of 1912. The new place had, in addition to the store area, a balcony which made a good office, a backroom space for shipping and a

basement for storage and stock. Later an upstairs room was rented for catalog mailing.

George installed himself in the new location with an increased staff consisting of two young men and one office girl. With satisfaction and feeling a new sense of permanency and security, he faced the new year of 1913 ready to handle increased retail trade and mail order business. The volume didn't disappoint him. Sales — retail and mail order combined — amounted to $106,000 in 1913, but net profits again suffered because of the catalog costs, increased expenses, higher rent and payroll and with short margins caused by low selling prices.

Charlie Poison and George had been good friends since 1906, when George made his first trip to Kansas City in search of work. At that time Charlie was one of the first men he met at the Church of Christ. Charlie was also the only member of the congregation who owned an automobile, a one-cylinder Cadillac. To George's delight, he was invited home to dinner with Charlie that first Sunday and to take his first ride in a motor car. This was the beginning of a long friendship. With George's increase of business after taking over Charlie's store, some of the men on "auto row" made remarks to Charlie about this ambitious, rather odd young fellow. One of the men told Charlie one day he guessed George was OK and a go-getter but that there was one thing which struck him as odd about George Pepperdine.

"What's that?" Charlie asked.

"He is most painfully honest," was the man's assessment.

Many years later, after George had developed a chain of stores in the Pacific Coast area, his friendship and business relations continued with Charlie Poison. By this time, Charlie and his brother Harry had a rubber factory in Ohio, from which George bought large quantities of inner tubes, patches and other rubber goods.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Health Breaks as Business Booms

In 1914 the mail order business showed its greatest expansion up to that time. By working long hours at night George brought out an attractive catalog, which he first called "Ford Information and Supplies" and later named "Ford Owners' Supply Book." It was quite complete including all the items George could find by combing the market far and near. He was after items that were especially needed or desirable for Ford Model T cars. All accessories, parts, equipment, supplies, repair materials and tools that were especially adapted to use on Ford cars were well illustrated, plainly described and offered with a guarantee of "satisfaction or your money back."

Henry Ford had indeed arrived and with this new phenomenon — the Model T — hastening the mechanization of America, Western Auto was destined to get aboard through George's energy and ingenuity.

Henry Ford made and sold more than fifteen million of his Model T cars from 1909 to 1927. He made hundreds of millions of dollars in profit on them. During the same time, a few millions of dollars were made by Western Auto and other supply houses. The diligent and aggressive merchandising of parts, supplies and equipment to keep these cars

in good repair at low cost was a valuable service to the car owners. Many Ford owners, while pleased with its economy and dependability, were painfully aware that it wasn't the best-looking vehicle on the road. There were many jokes about the little car, which picked up such interesting monikers as "Tin Lizzie," "Puddle Jumper," "Roller Skate," "Flivver," "Leaping Lena" and "Spirit of St. Vitus."

Therefore, there was considerable demand for improved equipment to enhance the appearance of the car. Western Auto thus handled the latest style in equipment which served to give the Ford a face lifting and 'doll her up" to make it look "like an automobile."

Western Auto was out in the lead in this field simply because no other concern had such an attractive and complete catalog for the owners of Ford cars as George had devised. By this time George was able to obtain the names of all Ford owners through the new automobile registration records. He mailed out about 100,000 copies of the catalog. The response was nothing less than phenomenal. Sales for 1914 jumped to more than $229,000 and George came out with a net profit of several thousand dollars or more than all the previous years combined. Profits could have been even greater but George still adhered to his policy of low prices and short margins, believing that prestige and customer goodwill were worth more than large profits to a new growing business.

One very valuable feature of the Ford Owners' Supply Book was really a "scoop" on competitors. It cost considerable money to add to the book and took up five pages in the catalog, plus many long evenings of work, but George believed it was worth it. It was a section in the book on "Information on the Care and Repair of Ford Cars."

George had gathered facts and data from manuals, car service records and other authoritative sources. He wrote instructions in plain, easy-to-understand terms on every

phase of common repair jobs which the average man could attempt on his own car. In five pages of small print was crowded a volume of valuable information which Ford owners appreciated and which caused them to keep the book for continuous reference for everything from ignition troubles to valve grinding and from overheating to coil adjustment. The real pay-off for George was the fact that any trouble requiring new parts referred to the page number in the catalog where the part was featured as an item for sale at Western Auto.

Western Auto also issued a catalog of auto supplies for all other makes of cars but it was the Ford book which brought the most business because the Model T Ford "needed everything."

These were exceedingly busy days for George. While he had built a good organization of about twenty-five people by this time, he continued to work long hours at his office, handling correspondence and buying merchandise. Hundreds of details clamored for his attention. Almost every night at home he worked over advertising and the production of the catalog pages.

Inevitably, the heavy strain had its effect. George's health, pushed beyond its endurance, broke. One day in June, 1914, when he was just 28, George suffered a lung hemorrhage. Alarmed, he went to see a doctor.

"I'm afraid I must tell you that you have tuberculosis, Mr. Pepperdine," the doctor announced solemnly after the examination.

George, in his ignorance of the seriousness of the disease, reacted typically. "How long before I can go back to work?"

The old doctor stroked his chin. "Do you know anything about T.B.?" he asked.

"No," George admitted. "Except I've heard of people having it, of course."

"It's a very serious disease. Frankly, we don't know too much about it. Generally, no amount of medication helps."

George was beginning to look concerned.

"People do recover," the doctor went on. "But usually it happens from moving into a higher altitude where there is a dry climate. Rest and quiet are essential. I recommend that you go west — to Denver perhaps."

George regarded the doctor with dismay. "You mean for good? I have my business here, you know."

"Yes, I know, but your business won't do you much good unless you recover," the doctor said grimly. "I'd suggest you try Denver for a couple of months. There have been some extraordinary cures there. Can't you leave your business under someone's management for a while?"

George was thoughtful for a moment. "Yes," he said after reflecting, "I guess so. It's doing well, making a profit and I have some capable men with me. If it is a question of my recovery I'll have to go."

"In my opinion," the doctor said gravely, "it's necessary. I'd lose no time if I were you."

Within a week George was headed for Denver. He had given instructions to his assistants in store and office and felt everything there was under control. Lena and their two daughters, Florence and Esther, six and four respectively, went with him. The journey was made in a Model T driven by Lena's uncle, Elmer Baker.

The doctor had advised that George should have plenty of nourishing food, including raw eggs taken in milk. Thus many stops were made at restaurants and drug stores to follow the doctor's orders. At first the raw eggs didn't appeal to George's taste,„but before long he could "take them down" without making a face or otherwise showing any great displeasure.

Travel in that day and age was by no means easy and George sometimes wondered if he had been wise in attempt-

ing to make the trip over such primitive roads by car. At times the road was not more than twin tracks beaten down by horses hooves and wagon wheels. Weeds and grass often swept the axles as the car moved along, but the trip was made without anything more serious than flat tires, some teeth-rattling bumps, thick clouds of dust and sometimes deep mud.

For prairie-dwelling people the sight of the Rocky Mountains, seen as they approached Denver, seemed to sweep the sky. In the mile-high city George settled his family in a rented apartment and sought the advice of a lung specialist. The findings of the Kansas City doctor were confirmed. The Denver doctor prescribed a lot of rest, good food and a few "shots" of serum. George seemed to improve rapidly and after ten weeks he and Lena and the little girls returned to Kansas City.

George was advised to sleep either outside or with the windows open at night so that he could get plenty of fresh air. He took care of that problem by having a sort of balcony frame built underneath his upstairs bedroom window. On this frame, enclosed by tent canvas, a spring and mattress were installed. Each night, feeling a little like a bug, George would crawl through the window into the shelter.

But fresh air — especially the damp kind they have in Kansas City — was not the answer, George learned to his dismay. As winter progressed, he realized his health was not improving. Finally, he faced up to the fact that he couldn't hope to remain in the Kansas City climate permanently.

CHAPTER- TWENTY

Denver Branch-Then West Coast

George made plans to return to Denver for his health again in 1915. He also thought of possibly going on to California, where the Pan Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco and the Pan-American Exposition in San Diego, were being planned.

In spite of his weakened condition, George knew it was absolutely necessary, during the winter of 1914-15, for him to prepare a revised and improved catalog for the coming year.

With that out of the way finally, George and his family arrived in Denver in the late spring of 1915. While breathing in the good air of the mountain city, he also made plans to open his first branch store there.

On his visit of the previous summer, George had been impressed by the number of cars on the streets. Moreover, the mountain states territory was a large area open to sales in the mail order line, he felt sure.

George opened his branch store at 1564 Broadway and brought out Oscar McCalla, one of his best salesmen in Kansas City, to manage the new Denver facility. George watched the new venture with anxiety at first but this soon gave way to satisfaction. The store, both retail and mail order, was a success from the start.

That summer he continued on to California with his

family by train, first to San Francisco and then to San Diego to attend both Expositions. George was impressed with California and kept his eyes open for business opportunities, thinking that perhaps it might be a better place to settle than Denver. He was particularly impressed with the. moderate climate of California, which he felt would be good for his health.

At the end of the summer, feeling better physically but by no means fully recovered, he returned to Kansas City. His business was flourishing, thanks to increased catalog mailings, indeed, the volume of sales rose to $270,000 in 1915, although again the margin of profit was small.

More and more, however, George's mind returned to California. He knew that unless he regained his health, which seemed unlikely in the cold dampness of Kansas City, no amount of success would mean anything to him. If he could recover in California, he felt certain that he could establish himself in business there without difficulty. California, with its plentiful supply of cars and its citizens seemingly busy and prosperous, looked like a promising field for business. He also had discovered no competitor using a Ford Owners' Supply Book and had every reason to believe this would succeed in California as well as anywhere.

Fortunately, at this juncture, he had a prospect for taking over the Kansas City business. Don A. Davis, an employee of the printing concern that did George's catalogs, made an offer to buy controlling interest in the store. Davis didn't have a great deal of cash, but George knew him to be industrious and honest. He decided to sell.

Davis paid George $1,000 in cash and gave him a note for the remainder. George was also to be paid a salary of $150 a month for a stated period.

The business had made a profit in 1914-15, but George withdrew most of it, or about $7,000 in cash and goods, to

start the Denver branch in the summer of 1915. This store he retained for himself and reserved the right to operate Western Auto Stores in the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast states. The Denver store prospered with sales of $50,000 in 1915 and increased rapidly year by year.

With $1,000 in cash and the $150 monthly salary promised, George and his family left Kansas City by train early in January of 1916, bound for San Diego. George had a secure feeling as he looked forward to a rest for a few months and then, his health permitting, to start business operations in California.

George tried to relax and take it easy after arriving in San Diego in early January of 1916. For a few weeks he was content to do nothing. After trying unsuccessfully to suppress his discontent, he announced to Lena that he thought he'd take a run up to Los Angeles "to look the situation over."

"I want to see what is going on in the auto supply business up there," he said innocently. "It's a big place. San Diego is too small — not much going on in auto supply business here."

"You shouldn't think of going into business so soon," Lena protested. "You know you should take a year or two and build up your health."

He grinned sheepishly. "Well, it wouldn't hurt to look around."

Lena knew her husband. "You certainly aren't strong enough to establish a store."

"I know," George conceded. "I don't aim to. I'll just look."

George's "aim" wavered a bit before the trip was over.

In Los Angeles he strolled down Main Street, the principal auto row from 10th to 14th Streets. Here he found numerous stores handling auto accessories and tires, many of them operated on both a wholesale and retail basis.

"I couldn't do any good here — too many stores already," was George's first reaction as he counted off the establishments.

He didn't find much encouragement even in talking to several men in business in the area. He told them of his former business in Kansas City and admitted he had thought of going into business out here for some time.

"This business is badly overdone," one man told him. "You can't possibly make any money. If you want to go broke, just start an auto supply business in Los Angeles."

Another said: "You are just the man I want to see; I'll sell you this store for the cost of merchandise — $12,000."

George declined. He had only $1,000 to invest. He walked down Main Street. He saw a "For Rent" sign on a little vacant store at the corner of Main and 12th.

"I'll just look at it," he told himself. "It won't hurt anything to look."

George looked. The sign in the window directed him to get a key from next door. He got the key, then, with mounting excitement, he unlocked the building and went in. After inspecting the vacant store, about 18x70 feet, he returned the key.

George walked on, thinking of the rental — good location, right in the middle of "Auto Row" and rent for only $75 a month. He went into several other auto supply stores which seemed to be doing business at a good rate. To his practiced eye, however, he saw in most of them areas where he would change the stock or display the merchandise to better advantage. The thought of the little vacant store lingered in his mind. At last he surrendered to the temptation and turned back toward 12th and Main.

Was the space just waiting for him? George pondered the situation. While it was true that there were several other supply houses in the area, he had found none special-

izing in Ford supplies. None of them issued a catalog anything like his and he hadn't seen any as attractive. The space was just waiting for him, he decided, as he sought out the owner to make a small deposit to hold it for him.

Back in San Diego next day, George explained to Lena what he had done and why.

"I'll write and see if two of your brothers will come out," he hastily added. "They can do most of the work — I'll just boss."

"I know you and your bossing," she retorted. "You'll be working sixteen hours a day. Oh, well, if you've made up your mind, go ahead."

In a short time the lease transaction was completed. George immediately wrote to Lena's brothers. His mind was filled with plans for the opening of the store. The brothers-in-law, Herbert and Ralph Baker, came out promptly and the trio was soon busily building shelves and putting in display counters. Hal Baker was in military service at the time but later, both he and Ernest joined George in the Los Angeles operation.

George made arrangements for extended credit with a large Chicago wholesale house for assorted stock for the opening of the new store. He made the same kind of arrangements with factories on goods needed in large quantities. He succeeded in getting a carload of tires on extended credit from his good friend, Carl Pharis of the Pharis Tire & Rubber Co. in Ohio. At the same time, he ordered additional catalogs from the Kansas City printer, with the Los Angeles address imprinted on them, to be mailed directly to the names of Ford owners which George had secured.

Finally the opening day arrived, March 20, 1916, which was Lena's birthday. During the first two weeks after the store opening, business was slow, but George, while waiting for customers to receive their catalogs and start ordering merchandise by mail, was busy with correspondence to the

factories and local business arrangements. The Baker boys were busy finishing the installation work; placing all goods properly on shelves and getting everything in tip-top shape for the expected rush of business.

As expected, the rush did indeed come. Walk-in business was anything but spectacular at the start, but as soon as the catalogs reached their destinations the little store was crowded with customers and mail orders began to pour in from all over the Pacific Coast.

Just ten days after the new store opened, on April 1, 1916, an incident occurred which George used to refer to as an "April Fool joke." There was very little business that day when a customer came in and asked for two tires for his Overland Roadster, which he had parked at the side of the store. The boys, pleased to have a customer, got busy. Herbert made the sale and then went to other chores while Ralph installed the tires and inflated them with a hand pump.

Each boy thought the other had collected the $26 for the tires, but after the customer had gone they discovered that neither one had done so. The boys didn't know whether to blame each other or the customer for pulling an April Fool's Day joke or the "unlucky" $13 per tire. They spent hours checking through the mailing list of car owners in and near Los Angeles, trying to find the type of roadster now wearing two brand new free tires, but it was like looking for a needle in a haystack.

Despite that early setback, business boomed. At the end of 1916, representing nine months of business operation, sales in the first Los Angeles store amounted to more than $56,000. Next year the sales figure jumped to $171,000. During the years of the first World War, 1917-18, business continued to expand at an amazing rate. George was faced with some difficulty in securing supplies and with rising prices, but not seriously. The little store at 12th and Main

soon had to be enlarged, taking in an adjoining storeroom. Then, in 1918 George rented another building at 911 South Grand Avenue. This became his headquarters and housed the largest automobile supply store in the country. In 1920 the two Los Angeles stores rang up sales of more than $700,000!

George bought his merchandise directly from the manufacturers in most cases, buying on the usual credit terms and selling for cash. His goods were turned over rapidly on a low margin of profit. Because of the large volume of the retail and mail order business, the amount of merchandise handled was huge.

In the meantime — remembering his success with his large chain of rabbit traps on the farm in Kansas — George decided to apply the same principle in the auto supply business. Thus he began to open up completely stocked branch stores in other areas, the first such outlet established in 1918 in Phoenix, then one in San Francisco, Oakland, Fresno, Seattle and elsewhere in the West.

By 1920 he had eleven stores, including the one in Denver. The branch stores more than justified his high hopes, in some instances doing a tremendous $100,000 business during their first full year of operation. Such a volume required handling literally tons of goods. A large portion of total sales was made up of small items such as radiator hoses, fan belts, brake lining, gaskets, piston rings, lubricating oil and scores of things that ranged in price from 10 cents up. Frequently sales were boosted by tires, storage batteries and other large items and occasionally there were such large sales as a set of wire wheels, a "Speedster body" or a "Rajo" cylinder head.

After the booming start of business in 1916 and 1917 on the Pacific Coast, George's enterprise pyramided rapidly. The merchandise inventory, plus fixtures and other assets in all stores combined, grew to about $850,000 by

June of 1920, and the net worth of his business was approximately half that amount. When one considers the small original capital investment, this was phenomenal. However, the difference between his assets and the actual amount of his net worth meant that he had very heavy accounts payable, in short, he owed the manufacturers for about half of the goods in his eleven stores and warehouses.

This situation didn't appear dangerous, and it wasn't as long as business was booming. Sales in all eleven stores combined were at the rate of about $2,000,000 a year in 1920. Merchandise being purchased on 30 to 60-day credit terms and sold for cash provided plenty of working capital. However, in 1920 there occurred a slight post-war depression and many people became frightened and this slowed sales down somewhat. Then the picture changed quickly and George found himself in an awkward position. Bills began to come due faster than the money came in from sales. As it turned out, his real trouble was too rapid expansion. He was buying merchandise in greater quantity to stock new stores and the outgo was exceeding the income from sales for the last year or two. This rapid growth brought him problems he had not anticipated.

George began to be filled with apprehension as he fell behind on payments to the factories. His first thought was to explain the matter to the bank and borrow money to carry the overstock of merchandise until it could be reduced. To his dismay, he found the bank was not interested in loaning money for capital purposes to a young organization which was over-extended. George had the feeling the bankers were very unsympathetic and non-cooperative, but they seemed to think they were doing him a favor by being so severe.

The bank even refused to make a substantial loan against warehouse receipts' on the surplus stock of tires and other merchandise which George owned in warehouses.

The bankers expressed the fear that it might eventually become the owner of the merchandise under such a contract. But what one banker lacked in sympathy he made up for in advice and his advice to George Pepperdine was to immediately close several of the branch stores, ship the merchandise to central locations, put on a big overstock closeout sale at greatly reduced prices and thus raise money with which to reduce accounts payable.

That might be one way, George conceded, but it was not the way he wanted to operate. Every one of the stores was making a fine profit. George believed the economic slump would be only a temporary one; moreover, his dream envisioned expansion rather than retrenchment until he had hundreds of stores. Spurred by his ambitions and the determination to keep building, George, decided the only alternative to the banker's suggestion was to incorporate all the stores into one large company and sell stock to raise money for additional capital.

Details were worked out quickly with the help of Attorney John F. Sheran, who was most helpful in the involved transaction. Mr. Sheran found a new stock brokerage firm with offices in San Francisco and Los Angeles which was willing to undertake the sale of a million-dollar issue of stock, part preferred and part common.

The stock, when put on the market by the brokers, sold readily because of the excellent record of profits made by Western Auto Supply Stores. The sale of the stock was completed in 1921 and the money gave George plenty of new capital for expansion.

When he was preparing to sell the issue of stock in the fall of 1920, many people predicted it couldn't be done. His banker was equally gloomy, saying "If you had tried it last year, or even six months ago before this slump became so severe, you might have succeeded but not now."

George, of course, was the first to admit he didn't know

as much about slumps as bankers knew, but he also obviously wasn't very familiar with the phrase, "it can't be done." So he went ahead and did it.

Salesmen for the stock brokerage went out to the small towns as well as into the large cities and contacted the "common people," many of whom were customers of Western Auto stores. They sold the stock in small combination packages of preferred and common shares. In that way the buyers were sure to get some returns, because the preferred assured them eight per cent, while the common, though more speculative, had possibilities of even greater returns. Sales were made on the installment plan, which was safe since the stock was not delivered until the price was fully paid.

While waiting for stock sales to get under way during the latter part of 1920 and 1921, it required a lot of communication on George's part to persuade the creditors to wait for their money, but they did wait very patiently when the whole story was made clear to them. Happily, they were well rewarded during 1921 and thereafter, not only with full payment of their old accounts but with new and larger orders for merchandise to supply additional new stores.

Western Auto had survived a crisis and was now ready to "shift into high gear."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

George Seeks Top People

George Pepperdine and Western Auto entered upon an amazing and exciting phase of business growth following the successful sale of stock in 1921 in spite of the negative advice of gloomy bankers. Incredible as it may seem, he held close to his schedule of twenty-five new stores a year, averaging the opening of one every two weeks, in the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast states. Five years later the 1926 catalog showed the addresses of 150 branch stores.

This was, as some called it, "expansion with a vengeance," and it required the handling of a multitude of details in the proper distribution of goods, training of personnel, advertising, the selection of new locations and the installation of fixtures and merchandise.

Before a new store was opened in any locality an exhaustive analysis of conditions under which it would operate was carried out. No longer was this determined on a casual stroll down a busy street. Each local store was located scientifically according to the number of automobiles, the type of cars predominating and the income of the citizens of a given area. Sometimes a town was studied a year or more before the time was judged favorable for establishment of a branch store there. Each of the stores, as nearly as practi-

cable, was an independent operating unit. Each had its trained resident manager, who had come up through the ranks from another store. Then the sales personnel were drawn from the city in which the store operated.

With the rapid expansion of the business, the training of salesmen and store managers became a monumental task in itself. George was not satisfied to choose men solely on the basis of their ability as salesmen or executives. First and foremost, in George's opinion, Western Auto Supply Company people, men and women, had to be of good character. It wasn't easy to get into the Pepperdine organization, and the newcomer was strictly on probation for a time, but once he passed the test and was accepted as one of the "family," the salaries and bonuses were attractive and the opportunities for promotion were extraordinary.

George constantly found himself in need of a new manager, a new executive, or a new salesman as the number of stores increased. He looked for intelligent men — men capable of advancing from salesman to managers on short training. It was his policy never to go outside for managerial personnel that could be developed inside. It proved to be a wise policy. And because George insisted on character, ability, physical and moral cleanliness when he hired office boys, typists, clerks and other subordinates, he had first-class material from which to make selections for the growing number of executive positions as they materialized. Word quickly spread that the door to promotion was wide open and that advancement depended entirely upon performance. Thus the best class of applicant was attracted to Western Auto and with it came a cheerful, loyal, cooperative spirit that was a large factor in the success of the business.

This attitude of cooperation pervaded the whole company, not just the main office. George kept in close touch with the branch managers and constantly urged upon each

the necessity of maintaining a high degree of integrity in the branch store employees.

Employees in these branch stores were also encouraged to think in terms of community interests. George's attitude was: "We endeavor to make our branch stores equal to a locally owned store in value to the community in every way. Each manager is required to belong to his local Chamber of Commerce and one service club. We do our part in supporting local community chests and charitable work, and try to have each manager take the place of a local merchant in every possible way. We pay better than usual salaries, our employees patronize the local institutions and merchants, thereby doing their part in building up the local community."

George regarded his loyal and capable executives as "the heart of my business" and gave them much credit for its success. Many of them grew up rapidly from salesmen or office men and were ready for advancement when the openings occurred. Among Lena Pepperdine's five brothers, three chose their careers with Western Auto, beginning in the first store in Kansas City, and became top executives.

Hal Baker became the first employee in 1911 in Kansas City. He started as an errand boy, then became shipping clerk and then a salesman. After a period of military service in World War I he joined Western Auto in California, advancing to sales manager and then general manager. That was quite an advancement for the young fellow of 16 who used to "shag" tires in the fledgling Kansas City store.

Ernest Baker started in Kansas City as shipping clerk, then became a salesman and later a store manager. Afterward he moved to Oakland as district manager for all the operations in the San Francisco Bay area.

Herbert Baker moved up the ranks from office work, to salesman, to store manager and finally to stock control manager. In that last position he had the great responsi-

bility of over-stock or under-stock of merchandise in all warehouses and branch stores.

John Sheran, a young attorney from Minnesota, located in Los Angeles about the time George opened his first store there. In the early years he handled some small legal matters from time to time, and in 1920 he did the legal work when George incorporated and issued stock which was sold for capital purposes. Then during the years of rapid expansion and installation of many stores, Mr. Sheran was employed fulltime, with an office adjoining George's, where he handled all leases, contracts, tax matters and legal problems.

Sam Miles came to Western Auto in 1920 from the auditing department of the State of California. He became secretary of the corporation and financial advisor.

Harry Press became advertising manager in 1922 and proved to be a most valuable man in advertising and in a general advisory capacity.

R. Victor Langford was another valuable executive, versatile and helpful in personnel, public relations and special assignments.

George was always high in his praise of all the junior executives, buyers, district managers, store managers and all who held responsible positions and worked conscientiously and diligently for the success of the business.

Lena Pepperdine joined her husband in the office in 1919, as soon as their children were old enough to leave with a "house mother," and worked fulltime as vice president and treasurer of the company. Lena won the friendship of all the employees and she was especially capable of overseeing the work of the large force of office girls and in selecting new girls for the various departments. She was active in a service club for women, the Soroptimists, and helped Western Auto office girls to form girls clubs similar to men's clubs in the various districts.

Because of the "family" nature of the business, the good pay and opportunities for advancement, Western Auto had excellent labor relations.

"We are not bothered with labor problems," George explained in an interview about 1925, "likewise our workers are not bothered with the fear of being 'exploited.' Having been on both sides of the fence, first as a wage earner and then as an employer, I can fully realize the importance and necessity of teamwork. That is the reason we have developed in the Western Auto Supply Company what we call the 'Western Auto Family,' which promotes a spirit of friendliness, confidence and helpfulness in all departments and branch stores. All the managers and salesmen take a great interest in the business and work as conscientiously as if the store in which they work belonged to them."

And, in a way, the store did belong to them. "Our cooperative plan," George went on, "has made it possible for employees to have stock in the company, and about three-fourths of them are stockholders. Not only do they draw their share of the dividends, but they receive a liberal annual bonus either in cash or in company stock in addition to a regular salary. They appreciate being treated as friends and co-workers, rather than as cogs in a machine which operates only for the purpose of grinding out dollars. I believe a large measure of the success of our company has been due to the attitude which Mrs. Pepperdine and I, and our executives, have shown toward our employees, as co-workers. We have tried to build an organization which not only will be of mutual profit and satisfaction to all concerned, but which will stand as a monument to the fact that capital and labor can be friends."

As might well be expected, the employees responded to this sort of treatment with loyalty and enthusiasm. As a result, the turnover in personnel was much lower than was usual in a concern the size of Western Auto. And the

"Western Auto Family" came to be recognized in the business world as a living example of the high plane that can be reached by a commercial organization whose executives appreciate the value of human interest and sympathy toward the workers. It cemented the organization together with loyalty and good fellowship, thereby promoting a pleasant and valuable state of mutual confidence and co-operation.

As the number of stores increased, it was necessary to establish district offices in warehouses in Denver, Seattle and Oakland, in addition to Los Angeles. This expansion, of course, added complications to the personnel program, but the district managers did well in emulating the Los Angeles plan of promoting out of the "family" in each district, which insured the harmony and loyalty of all the co-workers in each area.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Satisfaction or Money Back

One of George Pepperdine's basic principles of business from the very start was to please the customer and build goodwill. From the very first catalog there appeared on the front cover or just inside the book in prominent type, "Satisfaction or Your Money Back." And in the front of the catalog appeared "Our Policy," which explained that every dollar sent in for goods was held subject to return until the customer received his shipment and found everything entirely satisfactory.

Many competitors, some good friends and even some of George's salesmen felt such a guarantee unrealistic, claiming that it sounded phony and that many people would take advantage of it.

"If you live up to it," George was told, "you will go broke making free adjustments. If you don't live up to it you will be the laughing stock of the trade and customers will have no confidence in your company."

George, aware that some would take advantage of the guarantee, nevertheless was completely serious in making it and wanted it put before the buying public in positive, unequivocal language so plain that any person would know exactly what it meant.

Frequently good salesmen, who were being imposed upon by dishonest customers, would come to George with the complaint that the guarantee was costing the company too much — that some were "robbing us." George asked these salesmen to keep an account of the amount of money lost in making unfair adjustments for a month and see what percentages of sales it figured. To their surprise, it was not as large as they had anticipated.

George knew there were some defective articles and some breakage that should be adjusted. Even the tire manufacturers gave partial credit on defective tires. The portion Western Auto took on "policy" adjustments, then, turned out to be money well spent as "good-will" advertising, and the percentage of unfair customers — such as those who showed up with tires which had obviously been ruined by broken bottles or sharp rocks — was surprisingly small. George's policy won out as the word got around that Western Auto "sure makes good on their guarantee on everything."

With such a policy of fairness to customers, plus the fact that Western Auto sold quality merchandise at worthwhile savings to the customers, great inroads were made into the sales of the older, well-established auto supply houses in the West during the decade of 1916 to 1926.

"What are we going to do with Western Auto Supply Company?" was the context of a report George heard about from a meeting of the leaders in the business. "They are taking the retail business and we feel the pinch." To which another man spoke up, the way George heard it, and said, "My friend, it is not a question of what are we going to do with Western Auto, but what they are going to do with us."

To paraphrase an old saying about American enterprise, George Pepperdine had "built a better rabbit trap" and the customers were beating a path to his door. He didn't really have to "do anything" about his competition — except

business as usual — because he had all the momentum going his way.

The large, old-line auto supply houses knew they had to do something. What they finally decided to do was change their policy to "wholesale only." They believed that the car dealers, garages, service stations and small independent stores, which were becoming numerous in the rapidly increasing population of the West, should rightfully get the retail trade and that all such dealers would buy more readily from houses which would not compete with the dealers.

They reasoned that this would show a loyalty to the dealers and gain their friendship. The wholesale houses would continue to make sales at full prices to the retail customers who might come in, but would ask the name of the dealer most convenient for the customer and send to that dealer a check for his profit on the sale. This would further cement good dealer relationship.

But the grand scheme backfired. When those concerns advertised "wholesale only," it quickly discouraged their retail trade and droves of them flocked to Western Auto. Later in analyzing why the plan worked right into George's hands, he decided it was for two good reasons. In the first place, customers didn't like the changed attitude of the stores with which they had been trading. Secondly, they knew prices would be higher at the small dealers, which also didn't have Western Auto's desirable money-back guarantee.

Of course, the "wholesale only" stores prospered during those booming times in the auto industry, but not on as large a scale as they had contemplated. They were well established and had many friends among the dealers and service stations. They prospered because there was enough business available for all on the Pacific Coast and the swelling numbers of cars in daily use made business good

for all. Furthermore, many people were buying larger cars which could not be so easily repaired at home by their owners, who had to turn to the repair shops. The garages, in turn, would buy their needed supplies from the wholesale houses.

So, in the end, matters worked out all right and business leveled off for all concerned on a "live-and-let-live" basis. However, Western Auto's share of the total sales became increasingly large because of the low prices, many convenient store locations, good quality merchandise, courteous service and the "satisfaction or your money back" guarantee.

From the beginning of the business back in 1909 the sale of tires constituted about one-third or more of the total business. Therefore, George always gave special attention to the advantage and merits of the different brands, their peculiar qualities and their sales possibilities. In 1909 almost all of the standard brands were guaranteed for only 3500 miles; soon thereafter, as tires were made better and roads were improved, some tire makers increased their guarantee to 5000 miles, then in later years to 10,000 miles and more.

During the first ten years of the business George tried numerous methods of selling several makes of tires. If he sold the well known standard brands the discount was short. He couldn't give discounts large enough to be attractive to the customers because all other dealers could do as well. He tried brands not as well known, on which he could get larger discounts and act as general distributor. This gave customers a better discount, but the less known brand names also created a resistance to sales. Furthermore, all the advertising he did for such brands accrued to the benefit of the manufacturer in case George decided to change brands or lost the distributorship.

After much study and investigation George decided in 1922 that in the long run Western Auto Supply Stores should have their own brand of tire. In this case all adver-

tising would benefit the company, the tire would be distinctive in appearance, molds would belong to Western Auto and could thus be moved to other manufacturing plants if necessary, quality could be regulated by rigid specifications and the cost could be kept down by competitive bidding and by contracting for rubber and fabric at the right time, and Western Auto's famous guarantee would be back of tire sales. The purpose of the design was, first of all, to make the tire long-wearing, then attractive and sturdy in appearance and not too complicated for the mold makers. The investment in metal molds for all the sizes and types of tires ran into large money, but, thanks to the new capital from the sale of stock, the money was available, and the investment paid off handsomely.

"This is just what we have been waiting for" was the response of thousands of customers upon the appearance of the sturdy, serviceable, good looking tire being offered at Western Auto at prices twenty to thirty percent less than well known brands of equal quality.

This new tire was George's pride and joy. Friends called it "George's Baby." He kept improving it from time to time and devising additional ways of promoting sales through better advertising and displays, more intelligent salesmanship and methods of getting all salesmen to remember to suggest tires to all customers buying other items.

"Western Giant" was the official name of "George's Baby." When visiting a store, the first thing George looked at was the general appearance of the store, then he moved to the display of tires and checked into the sales initiative being given to Western Giant. Several years after the tire was introduced, it was estimated that there were more than three million Western Giants then running on the roads.

Everything didn't continue to be rosy in the tire business. During 1925-26 the tire business increased until it represented well over one-third of the total sales. Mean-

while, the price of rubber was climbing as its use increased in the United States. The market was influenced by international cartels, the manipulations of which were not very familiar to George. In buying ahead of future needs George — like tire manufacturing concerns — was badly hurt. Rubber prices rose from about forty cents a pound to $1.25 within a year. George, like many others, was eager to buy ahead of the advances in price in order to remain competitive and hold tire costs down. Western Auto had contracts for rubber and the production of tires for more than a year ahead when the price suddenly dropped down to less than half the peak because of international manipulations.

This drop caused a heavy loss, because the orders could not be cancelled. George received fine cooperation from the tire manufacturers through whom he had contracts for rubber and tires, but even with all the trimming of costs they could make, there was a long period when tire profits were very slender or non-existent.

This tire setback was only one of the ups and downs of Western Auto, which experienced "lean years" typical of any large concern on a path of development and expansion. Frequently these lean years failed to show enough net profit to afford the liberal dividends George thought should be paid to stockholders. On some of these occasions George waived all or part of his own dividends in order to leave enough money in the surplus account so that all other stockholders would get full dividends.

Of course, George couldn't recoup this loss the following year or later, because he could not be paid any more dividends at any time than the rate at which all others were paid. So he suffered his losses in silence. This practice was never mentioned to stockholders or employees. Only a few of the executives in the office knew about it. Many would regard this as a magnanimous gesture on the part of the president and owner of the largest block of stock, but

George considered it simply as one step in his unwritten duty — a silent act in his fulfillment of the Golden Rule. George never kept records on the amount of dividends he waived, but in later life he estimated that it amounted to something near to $200,000 a year.

While George Pepperdine suffered such sacrifices in silence, he wasn't the least bashful in expressing his attitude about life in general. Not surprisingly, there was no discernible difference in his philosophy about business, for both, he believed in setting a goal and then driving hard to attain it. One of his favorite quotations was: "Anything that is worth doing at all is worth doing well." He was determined to make Western Auto a big success. He did not like to see anyone disappointed — hence the secret waiver of his dividends. He also genuinely wanted customers pleased with service, prices and quality of goods. He wanted his employees satisfied with their salaries, bonuses and profit sharing. He wanted his executives to be happy and efficient.

George once said: "Building a business is like building character — it takes time. Character is the result, not of one act or occasion, but the cumulative effect of a series of often unimportant incidents. We believe we have put into this business a continuous flow of moral fiber, a conscious sense of fair play for the purchaser as well as the seller."

This kind of philosophy, naturally, reflected in the public promotion of Western Auto. Advertising was one of George's hobbies. He believed it should be attractive, intelligent, honest and "lots of it." He was always looking for unique ways to attract customers and get them to recognize his stores as "headquarters for auto supplies."

"Saving Sam" entered the picture in the 1920s and 1930s to help George project the "clean" image he wanted Western Auto to portray. "Saving Sam" became the company's trade character, a drawing of a congenial little fellow who appeared in ads for many years. "Saving Sam"

was created in 1918 by a commercial artist, Robert S. Van Rensselaer. George named the little fellow and used him to give personality to his advertisements and to typify the company's policy of service and reasonable prices. The original "Saving Sam," therefore, was drawn with one hand outstretched to render service and aid the motorist; the other hand in his pocket to denote the saving that could be made at Western Auto Stores, and the cheery smile to typify the spirit which George insisted should characterize the company slogan, "saving and service with a smile." "Van," the creator of "Saving Sam," became a valuable friend to the company and his services were used for many years.

From the time of his inception, "Saving Sam" played an important part in the advertising program. Considerably more than a million dollars was spent within a decade on newspaper ads which carried the picture of the genial trade character. He also appeared in catalogs, magazines, on billboards, on signs on the stores and eventually was an animated shape on a huge electric sign above the company's headquarters in Los Angeles.

George was a firm believer in the use of many kinds of advertising, but he also believed that advertising alone was not enough.

"I still insist," he once said, "that it is the satisfied customer who, in the long run is responsible for the growth of any business."

He believed that good personnel was the key to satisfying customers. He never ceased to drill his men on the importance of the impression they made on the customer. "The impression you make," he would say, "is the impression which the customers will hold of Western Auto," and he would conclude: "In other words, YOU, the salesmen ARE Western Auto in the mind of the customer. Don't get into an argument with your customer even when you know

he is wrong. You can easily win an argument but lose a customer. It is better to merely bring certain facts to his attention, without challenging his position."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Western Auto Gets a "Palace"

The November, 1923 issue of THE WESTERN MOTORIST waxed eloquent about a new building in downtown Los Angeles — "a beautiful 'palace' of brick, steel and concrete . . . a great home to house the headquarters of the Western Auto Supply Company . . . the fulfillment of a dream of fourteen years."

Then the story went on to tell about the building and the man who conceived and built it after enjoying phenomenal business success. George had made the decision to build the structure in 1922. The surging growth of his company made it necessary to move from the cramped quarters at 911 South Grand. He and his executives poured over the plans for the new building and after roughing them out called in John M. Cooper, a capable architect and contractor in the city, and showed him what they had in mind.

Within a matter of days the ideas had assumed definite shape and early in January of 1923 bids were taken for the construction. The first shovelful of dirt was turned on the property at 1100 South Grand Avenue on March 10. By October the building was nearing completion and soon the process of moving stock from the old home to the new was under way.

Western Auto's new corporate home was in itself unique

in many ways. It embodied many advanced features and was regarded as one of the city's best built and best planned structures for its purpose. The building contained four stories and a basement. Notable among the many excellent features was the large amount of light available in the executive offices, the retail store, the warehouse rooms and the service shop. For display of seasonal merchandise the store had almost 200 feet of show windows — more than many good sized department stores possessed.

The exterior was faced with brown tapestry brick and attractively decorated with stone. Two imposing entrances, one on Grand and the other on Eleventh Street, were architecturally beautiful. Despite the beauty of the building, George made sure that every dollar expended was made to count for some practical use — making the general operation of the business efficient, convenient and pleasant.

Inside, the building had been planned with careful attention to functional details.

"Plans have been worked out with careful attention to the details, comfort of the customers, convenience in handling merchandise, health and comfort of the many employees," the story in THE WESTERN MOTORIST stated. "No money has been spared to make a beautiful and lasting structure, so equipped as to permit additional floors for future growth, and adaptable to the conditions of the business as changes may develop. Many unusual features have also been embodied in the new structure, features whose significance may escape the layman, but which will tend to make economical the management and operation of a great business."

One unique feature was the large "well" placed through the second floor, so that the offices were on a balcony around a tremendously large retail store. From this balcony the retail store activities could be observed, and employees and visitors alike enjoyed the view.

The building was the nerve center of the Western Auto Supply Company, operating in the eleven Western states. In planning it George had kept in mind his overall purpose — to produce a structure "that would provide adequate space for executive offices, the world's largest retail auto supply store, warehouse space in upper floors and basement for the big stock of supplies and at the same time make it possible to take care of the shipping, receiving and mail order business to better advantage and with greater dispatch."

In a grand opening celebration to which the public was invited, Mayor Cryer of Los Angeles spoke at the dedication of the new building on November 6, 1923.

George Pepperdine, then 37 years old and remembering his modest beginning, made his address to an overflow crowd inside the big store for the opening ceremonies. He thanked the crowd for coming to help Western Auto celebrate its "crowning achievement." He thanked the motoring public which had made it possible and expressed the hope that the service the company had rendered in the past and intended to provide in the future "will be good enough to merit a continuance of your confidence and patronage."

One can get a glimpse of the depth of his feeling as he said: "We have built our business on the solid foundation of integrity and fair dealing. We believe that all business transactions, in order to be successful and satisfactory, must be mutually profitable to both the buyer and the seller. Giving the public the greatest possible value and most satisfactory service have been very prominent factors in the success of this company. The fact that we have built this business from one small store to eighty stores proves that our efforts have been fully appreciated by the people.

"It is our purpose to maintain high ideals and fair policies in this business. It is our desire to continue our expansion and merit the leadership in this line of business.

Our ambition is not monopoly, but leadership. We are not trying, by our rapid expansion, to drown out competition but to explore the uncharted seas that are open before us all, in the opportunities that we believe we can see to serve the people with hundreds of stores in the Western states.

"We promise you that our methods will at all times be above reproach, that the quality of our goods will be the best that the market affords, that our policies of making adjustments and taking care of complaints of every nature will be mutually equitable, and that we will at all times strictly adhere to the highest ideals that could be maintained by a high-class, progressive business house. Upon these pledges we solicit the patronage of the motoring public."

This sincere speech, pledging as it did the whole company to high business ideals, was received in a generous spirit by the audience which filled the big store. Likewise, the public at large responded to such ethics translated into good merchandise, cheerful service and courteous treatment. The continually increasing patronage of motorists at the Western Auto Supply Stores made it possible for George to continue to expand.

As the company grew, George expanded his managerial family and clerical staff. Keeping the far-flung organization tied together was no small task. George spent a great deal of time on the road traveling from store to store. He also kept three "field men" on the road. But it was becoming increasingly obvious to him that it was impossible to keep his managers informed of all the developments and policies. This lack of knowledge went against one of George's fundamental business beliefs — that store managers must not feel they are simply cogs in an impersonal business machine. He felt each man must share in the profits of his store and at the same time share an esprit de corps which would

stimulate pride in his operation and make him cognizant of the. ideals, problems and achievements of the whole company.

George decided that one method by which this communications gap could be closed would be to hold managerial conventions. The first of these meetings was held in February, 1922 for managers in the Pacific Coast and Rocky Mountain area. It proved to be a huge success as George personally brought the managers up to date on accomplishments, plans and purposes and gave everyone an opportunity to know other members of the "family" better. The first convention was so successful that it was repeated in Los Angeles in 1924.

About 100 store managers and many executives were present for the convention, which was held in the auditorium of the new headquarters building. Again George spoke of the fundamental purposes of the business and in general made all those attending conscious of the fact that each played an integral part in the success of the business.

He summed up in this very personal way: "Regardless of the size to which Western Auto may grow, we want always to maintain a warm, human relationship between management and employee, and continue to build the spirit of our Western Auto family. We, of the management, want to regard you as our personal friends, and we want to be worthy of your personal friendship. We want everyone who is a part of the Western Auto family to be clean in his personal life and in his contact with the people. We want him to treat people in such a way that he will be regarded by the public as a wholesome person."

That George's fundamental beliefs had permeated his organization until they were shared by all the executives of the company was made clear from other speeches made during the convention by nearly a dozen speakers.

After five fruitful and busy days the convention drew

to an end. In addition to the speeches, there had been talks on many detailed matters, many specific instructions, many questions and answers and many personal interviews between store managers and various executives. Then on Thursday night a big banquet was staged and the convention climaxed on Friday with an all-day bus trip to the Orange Show in San Bernardino. All those attending returned to their stations "loaded" with information and with happy memories of their five days with other members of the Western Auto family.

These also became occasions for fun and relaxation. At one Christmas party given for several hundred members of the firm from the main office and all nearby stores, George was expected to hand out the annual bonus checks, amounting to thousands of dollars. George gave a joyful but serious talk. He thanked everyone for the fine work done and the loyalty shown during the past year. He told them he appreciated the good efforts and the increase of sales.

The sizeable audience waited expectantly as he paused and held up a stack of checks.

"But," he said solemnly, "I think there needs to be a testing period to see if the co-workers will hold out with the same enthusiasm and effort for the coming year."

Again he paused as the perplexed audience shifted nervously.

"If you all do as well and increase the sales equally as much in the coming year," came George's punch line, "then at the Christmas party a year from now, I will sign all these checks."

There was a wave of surprise, chagrin, exclamations of disappointment and, when it finally dawned on them that George's grin held the hint of mischief, a great burst of laughter.

George, of course, had already signed the checks and they were distributed immediately.

On another occasion the joke was turned on George. In a sales meeting of store managers and salesmen there had been lengthy discussions on methods and means of increasing sales. Numerous ideas had been studied and various proposals discussed. George, as usual, told them he was pleased and gratified with sales increases, "But I am never satisfied," he added. "When a man becomes fully satisfied, he does not strive for improvement."

Suddenly one of the managers jumped up and said he had an idea that would surely work — that there was no possibility of failure.

"With this plan," he boasted, "all the stores can actually double their sales during the coming year."

Naturally, everyone was on the edge of his chair waiting to hear such a plan, while at the same time wondering a bit about the man's sanity.

"I know," the manager went on in all seriousness, "that every manager will pledge — and make good on that pledge — to double sales in his store if Mr. Pepperdine will promise just one thing."

"What?" the crowd almost chorused.

"If Mr. Pepperdine will promise us that if we double our sales in the coming year he will get on a dead drunk," the man said.

That brought hilarious laughter — even from George Pepperdine — because everyone knew that George was a zealous teetotaler.

Another humorous happening during this era involved a factory representative. It was not uncommon in those days for customers or factory representatives to try to get special favors with Western Auto employees by claiming to know George personally. Once in a while a factory salesman would call on Western Auto buyers and use the story of intimate acquaintance with George to make an impression and get a larger order. Some of them "grew up next door

to George," some had known him since he started in business and had done him many a favor.

On this one occasion a factory man was working for a large order and boasted: "Oh, yes, George and I are good friends — the last time we traveled across country on the train together we played poker all the way." That was a little too much for the buyer who knew George well enough to know his feelings about gambling and to know the story was a fake, so it influenced him not at all.

A similar happening took place once when George was visiting one of the small stores in Oregon. While he was there a customer came in wanting a free adjustment on a tire. He said he had formerly lived in California and told the store manager that he knew Mr. Pepperdine and that he knew "George would give me a free replacement."

"How fortunate you are," the store manager exclaimed. "Mr. Pepperdine is on a trip visiting the stores and it so happens that he came in here just a little while ago. I'll call him from the office to meet you."

The red-faced customer stammered something about being in a hurry and the manager, who had already suspected that the story might be a little exaggerated, kindly didn't make an issue out of it. A fair adjustment was made and the customer hurried away — happy over the settlement but still pretty obviously embarrassed over getting his "foot in his mouth."

Opening of the new headquarters building in Los Angeles not only represented a great milestone on the road to an immensely successful business venture, but it meant to George Pepperdine a solid monument to the rewards promised by the American free enterprise system. Here he was, a poor farm boy, now at the helm of a remarkable business concern — a thriving company started on "$5 and an Idea." George, of course, knew the idea was more valuable than the five dollars. Nearly anyone could have

put together that small amount of money at the same time in history. The difference was, George Pepperdine just happened to be the one who came up with the idea. Just as "his mind was an idea factory" as a boy on the farm, so it remained throughout his career. Ideas produced the mailing of circulars from his home in 1909, the unique way of gathering mailing lists of potential customers before motor vehicle registrations came into existence, the "Ford Owners' Supply Book," the "Western Giant" tire, "Saving Sam," and special brands of merchandise and supplies for his stores. His fertile mind supplied the ideas for uniform appearance of store fronts and window displays and for the efficient organization of executives, managers, salesmen, field superintendents and all other employees which resulted in a firmly welded and very happy and productive "Western Auto Family." He and his associates inaugurated an endless number of promotion ideas throughout the years. These included short cuts in handling merchandise and records, inventory control to keep stock investment down in the branches and methods of keeping shipments moving regularly to branch stores to prevent shortage of goods needed for the customers. All these ideas — including the payment of profit sharing and bonuses and many others — all added up to a business success that was phenomenal and which provided unusual satisfaction for its owners and workers.

George Pepperdine had indeed come a long way from running a chain of rabbit traps.

Not all of George's ideas paid off, of course, and one major dream back-fired completely. It came in the early 1920s during the most rapid expansion of Western Auto on the Pacific Coast, when George and some of his associates tried to develop the National Auto Supply Company in Chicago.

Western Auto of Kansas City had not yet started to expand eastward. George-had long dreamed of a chain of

auto supply stores developing from coast to coast. With that in mind, it was decided to start in Chicago and spread out from there. His thought was to build a large mail order and retail business in Chicago and move farther east toward the Atlantic Coast under the National Auto name; then when the nationwide merger occurred, that name would have been established.

In 1920 George leased a six-story building in the auto row on Michigan Avenue in Chicago. He established a large retail store and had 500,000 mail order catalogs sent to automobile owners in Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan and Indiana. Many thousands of orders came in. For a while sales were more than $60,000 a month. However, George was so completely tied up with his rushing activities on the West Coast that he could not give proper attention to the Chicago operation. O. J. McCalla, who made a great success of the Denver branch, was sent to Chicago as vice president and general manager of National. Everything looked rosy at first, but there soon were serious difficulties.

All expenses in Chicago were higher than out West. Employees were not as interested, efficient and loyal. Mail orders, though arriving in great quantities, were fewer per thousand of catalogs mailed — hence the percentage of cost for advertising was too high. Repeat orders were not as dependable. Competition was greater and the territory was being overworked by other mail order concerns. Among the greatest competitive firms, of course, were Chicago-based Sears Roebuck & Company and Montgomery Ward & Company, both strongly entrenched and with prices equally low.

After operating National nearly four years at a loss, George finally decided to close it out. Meanwhile, Western Auto of Kansas City was gradually extending its business East, after its first expansion proved successful in the Dallas and Minneapolis areas.

In closing out the National Auto Supply Company,

George was fortunate in getting out with a loss of only about $100,000. It later developed, after George's retirement, that "Western Auto" was an even better name than "National Auto" would have been for the nationwide business.

George was philosophical about the failure of the venture. Even though it showed him that big dreams do not always come true, his attitude was that good lessons are learned from failures, costly as they sometimes are.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

George Grows with Western Auto

George Pepperdine's lack of formal education in college or high school — although he always regretted he didn't have an opportunity for higher education — obviously didn't keep him from becoming an outstanding success in business.

As Western Auto Supply Company continued to grow and prosper during the 1920s, George, as its founder, came to be recognized in the Los Angeles business world as a remarkable example of the self-made, successful, high-principled businessman. In this role, invitations, unsolicited by him, poured in from Chambers of Commerce, civic and service organizations asking him to speak before their individual groups and over radio. At first he refused most of them, then later reconsidered and began gradually to respond to the opportunities to present his viewpoint to the public as frequently as the pressure of his duties allowed.

By nature he was modest and disinclined to seek appearances or public applause. Nevertheless, he did feel very profoundly that the business world needed to be reminded again and again of its responsibilities and opportunities. That is not to say that his speeches were filled with plati-

tudes and preachments. On the contrary, his messages contained principles of common sense and fair dealings, based on the Golden Rule, which had proved to him to be sound and workable. It was somewhat of a novel notion to some, but no one could argue but that these principles worked for George Pepperdine.

During the 1920s and on into the next decade there was quite a bitter fight against the rapid growth of chain stores, with some claiming that they were hurting the small merchant and taking money away from the little towns, retarding the growth of local communities, etc.

Since he was one of the targets in the protests over chain stores, George naturally became involved in their defense.

At one time there was even an attempt to enact a California State law requiring all chain stores to be licensed and assessed an annual fee or special tax of $500 per store. George felt this was not only unfair but would have been just the beginning of tactics designed to cripple the chain store industry. If this law had been enacted, the fee could have been increased from time to time until the chains were put out of business, George felt.

Western Auto, along with other chains, such as the variety and food stores, entered the fray with advertising and other means of defense. A number of trips were made to Sacramento to gain the approval of Governor Merriam, on behalf of chain stores. George's own efforts on the radio were a powerful influence in the outcome. He argued that human progress demands that improvement be made in methods of merchandising as well as in other lines of endeavor; that it is inevitable that the customers, the public, shall have the benefit of savings brought to them by more efficient and economical handling and distribution of goods.

George's arguments were quite effective. He believed it was unreasonable to expect the people to enact a law

against their own interests and pocketbooks in order to protect inefficient merchants. If that kind of logic were carried to its conclusion, George reasoned, then the country would have to stop the manufacture of automobiles to protect the horse and buggy industry, stop railroads from operating to protect the stage coaches and so on.

"Obviously," George said, "the public would not be in favor of such a backward move. Such laws, if generally applied, would soon take us back to the dark ages. If the public does not like the chain stores, they have the right of withholding their patronage. This automatically would put the chain stores out of business without going the devious route of unjust pecuniary and confiscatory tax."

George also argued effectively that chain stores, when operated properly, support the local community and the Chamber of Commerce, advertise in local newspapers and pay property taxes. They also employ local people as far as possible and these people maintain their homes locally, patronize home industry, pay taxes on their homes, support local charities, clubs and churches and help in civic affairs the same as other local citizens. George also had figures to prove that the old argument about chain stores taking more money out of the local communities was a fallacy.

The outcome of the fight was that the proposed anti-chain store legislation failed to become law and no further attempts were made to renew such efforts.

In the summer of 1924 George went on a three-week vacation trip with the Chamber of Commerce Excursion group to the Hawaiian Islands. This gave him the opportunity to visit his eldest daughter, Florence Crossley, who still lives in Honolulu. It was intended to be only a rest and pleasure trip, but it turned out to be an important business occasion, in fact, George had harbored a secret feeling before the trip that Honolulu might be a good place for a

Western Auto store. That territory had been overlooked up to that time in Western Auto's rapid expansion program mainly because it was so far away and all hands were busy at home.

George was impressed with the beauty of Hawaii on his first visit. Entertainment and sight-seeing programs had been planned for the tourists to fill every day and evening with exciting adventures around the Islands, but George deserted the party on some of the sight-seeing outings in order to investigate business conditions in general and the auto supply business in particular.

He found plenty of wholesale houses in that line and many garages, service stations and car dealers, but no retail stores. He considered the field "wide open" for a Western Auto type operation. Retail prices were high and selections were very limited. He believed Honolulu was made to order for a Western Auto store and that it would do a large business from the start.

George began a diligent search for a storeroom. The only one available was near the downtown district on Beretania Street, which was away from the automotive sales area. The store was too small, but George soon decided that a small place would be better than no place at all, so he rented it on the spot. Then he cabled his Los Angeles office to assemble immediately a complete opening stock of merchandise to be sent — along with a store manager — on the next ship.

Jimmie Taylor, manager of the Huntington Park store, was selected to come over by ship and prepare for the opening of the new store. He did it well. The Honolulu store was a big success from the beginning. Its greatest shortcoming was lack of goods to sell. The Matson Lines sailed only once each ten days. As a result, many items would be sold out within a day after arrival. Fortunately, customers were willing to wait their turn on future shipments, and

it wasn't long before larger lots were shipped and business grew tremendously.

With business out of the way in such an efficient style, George continued with the Chamber of Commerce group of sight-seers on the side trip to Maui and the big Island of Hawaii and on a trip by rail north from the town of Hilo.

George thoroughly enjoyed the excursion and took many photographs of the picturesque scenery, but at one point almost met with disaster. At one place the little train stopped on a trestle bridging a 100-foot deep canyon so the people could see the tropical trees and plants below. Many were taking Kodak pictures and having a great time when suddenly there was a crash. Another train, running off schedule, had come out of the tunnel behind the observation train. Unable to stop, the train plowed into the rear car of the one on which George was riding.

The track was on a slight curve and the car was thrown to one side so that the right wheels of the rear truck caught on the left rail of the track and held the car in midair on a dangerous slant over the canyon. The accident caused much excitement, of course, but no serious injury. Had the car been pushed a few inches farther, though, it would have tumbled down and very likely pulled the other car with it, with probable death to all on board. Call it luck or chance or Divine Providence — all versions were expressed among the survivors — everyone felt fortunate and happy to survive what could so easily have been a major tragedy.

George took it calmly and walked out a distance on the trestle to get a good photograph of the car hanging over the track into space. And, of course, his feeling about the escape coincided with those who felt Divine intervention had a hand in their escape.

"The Lord must have had some future use for me and all those other people, too," was George's reaction. "At

least, we have one more reason for which to thank Him each day."

During the "Roaring Twenties," when Western Auto stores were making their most spectacular growth, George began to feel a little less strain on his own time. He had built an excellent organization and had capable executives, dependable store managers, efficient district managers and field men, as well as a happy and hard working office force and warehouse crew.

By 1927, then, he felt that he could get away and travel a little, do some writing and rest a while. In the spring that year, he took his oldest daughter, Florence, then 18, and her close chum, Opal Poison, daughter of George's old friend, Charlie Poison, for an ocean trip down the west coast of Mexico and Central America. The cruise included stops at Guatemala, San Salvador, Nicaragua and Panama, then through the Canal to Cuba, Key West, Miami and home from there by rail. Later the same year George took both daughters, Florence and Esther, for a trip to Honolulu, Japan, China and the Philippines.

The next year, 1929, George took his mother on a trip around the world, going with a tourist party through England, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Egypt and Palestine, where they left the party and continued on to India, China, Japan and Hawaii. Their greatest interest was in the Holy Land, where George's mother was especially anxious to go.

George was an ardent booster for the Chamber of Commerce. He loved California and Los Angeles in particular. He not only believed it to be the land of opportunity, but was grateful for his complete recovery of health, for which he gave much credit to the climate.

The Chamber of Commerce in those days was involved in an intensive campaign to entice hundreds of manufacturing and industrial firms in the east to locate in California

and provide jobs for the hundreds of thousands of new people flocking to the Golden State. This endeavor was quite successful and for many years California led all other states in percentage of annual increase in manufacturing payrolls.

In his numerous talks and radio addresses, made on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce and the Advertising Club, George made strong appeals for these organizations and for the development program of Los Angeles industry. In one radio talk given on KNX radio in 1925, called "Los Angeles, the Heart of the World," George made some startling predictions which seemed rather "wild" to some conservative folk. However, in the light of subsequent growth in manufacturing and industry, the increase in population and cultural development, he was not such a bad prophet. In fact, California in many ways even exceeded his "wild prediction" of 1925, and George himself lived long enough to see many of these predictions come true.

George saw the growth and potential of the Pacific Coast as the development of a "great empire" — another achievement of "the richest and most powerful nation on earth."

"Many people, he told his radio audience that day in March of 1925, "cannot see any logical reason why the Pacific Coast territory should ever become the center of world activities. They regard such statements only as fanciful dreams and wild exaggerations of the day dreamer or the proverbial booster who has real estate to sell. I am here to tell you, friends, that neither the day dreamer, the enthusiastic real estate salesman, or the wildest speculators have yet been able to foresee even a small part of the great development of the future, or the intense human activity which will take place in Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Oakland, Seattle, Portland and other coast cities in the next few generations."

He went on to point out that it was America's political,

economical and religious freedom which had allowed the great developments of the country and would assure the growth he predicted for the Pacific states.

"The part which you and I may play in this wonderful future," he concluded, "depends entirely upon ourselves. It is not our mission to conquer the wilderness and plant settlements beyond the present bounds of civilization as our forefathers did. It is not our mission to fight Indians and brave the hardships of the deserts and plains. It is not our mission in this program of progress to go through the trying experiences that our ancestors endured, but it is our mission to put forth the same effort, display the same courage, marshal the same strength of determination and initiative that the early pioneers had, only we must operate in a different way. It is our mission to advance the ideals of modern civilization and social uplift, push forward the progress of scientific discovery as applied to commerce, industry, manufacturing, development of world trade, agriculture, irrigation and other matters of material progress. We must also push forward the boundaries of educational, moral and spiritual advancement and strive for the finer things of life."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Depression and Personal Tragedy

In the early part of the Great Depression, George Pepperdine suffered his most severe personal blow. In early October, 1929 Lena Pepperdine died. At the time of her death she was visiting their married daughter, Florence, who was then living in Honolulu.

Lena's death was due to parrot fever which, ironically, she contracted from two little love birds which she had brought back with her from a trip to South America a few months earlier.

Lena Pepperdine had been enthusiastic about the business from its beginning in 1909. In 1919, after their children were old enough so that she could enter the office full time, she not only filled the office of vice president and treasurer of the company, but performed the duties of an executive in a creditable manner and won the admiration of other executives and employees. After Lena's death, George's widowed mother came to live with him.

In a way, it was fortunate that George was faced with so many critical and perplexing business problems during those depression years in the early 1930s. The depression

was so acute that the sudden bleakness of his life, while not relieved, at least was so filled with details and difficult problems clamoring for attention that it was easier to immerse himself in work during the dreary days, months and years of the country's great economic setback.

The spectacular expansion of Western Auto during the early 1920s had slowed down to a steady growth in the latter part of the 1920s. By 1929 George was operating 170 stores in the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast area, with an annual sales volume of about 14 million dollars.

During the summer of 1929, before the big financial crash, George made an effort to consolidate Western Auto of the West Coast with Western Auto of Kansas City, to create a nationwide chain from coast to coast. When George's health had failed in 1915 he sold controlling interest in the Kansas City store to Don A. Davis, who took over the active management after George moved West. However, George had retained a large minority stock interest in the original Kansas City company. The growth of that company was also spectacular and by 1929 was operating some 100 stores in the larger cities throughout the central states, with an annual sales volume of about 15 million dollars.

In the proposed consolidation, which included the sale of a large new issue of stock, George was to have been president and have controlling interest of the new corporation. He and Mr. Don Davis made three trips to New York in the summer and fall of 1929 to work out details for the sale of stock with eastern brokers. Merrill Lynch and Company had tentatively agreed to underwrite the stock sale program.

The stock market was booming and the brokers thought they could sell a five-million dollar issue of stock very quickly. However, George and his associates were delayed so long in getting all the details of the merger worked out

that the crash of the stock market occurred just a few days before the transaction was to have been completed.

With the market crash everything came to a standstill and no one knew what would happen in financial circles. It was obvious that no stock could be sold on the New York market. The two men abandoned all hopes of immediately completing the merger. In fact, the nationwide consolidation of all Western Auto stores was not completed until many years later — long after both George and Mr. Davis had retired.

The immediate problem just then — in 1929 — was for the head of each company to put his house in order and prepare to weather the storm that was upon them. George, facing the future with quiet courage, returned to Los Angeles to cope with one of the most severe depressions the United States had ever known.

The depression which hit this country in 1929 was part of a worldwide phenomenon. The impact it made on the American people was deep and widespread. Early in September of that fateful year the stock market, in which over-speculation was excessive, began to show signs of declining, slowly at first and then with increasing momentum.

By the middle of October the market was in shambles with "gilt-edged" stocks dropping sometimes as much as twenty to forty points a day. Billions of dollars in paper values evaporated overnight. All efforts to stay the flood were futile. On October 29 more than sixteen million shares were sold and prices of even the best securities fell catastrophically.

George, back in Los Angeles from New York, watched these developments with close attention. A great fear and trepidation had seized upon businessmen. President Hoover and leaders of public opinion expressed confidence in the soundness and stability of the country's economy. These

hopeful assertions, well-meant, were to prove illusionary, for as 1930 opened, the hoped-for recovery did not take place and the depression intensified.

Determined to take whatever steps he could to meet the pervading gloom, George Pepperdine, in a meeting with his executives, called for drastic measures.

"Boys," he said, "we are in for hard times. I don't know how seriously this is going to affect us — no one knows how long this depression will last. But our business is sound and well capitalized, and we'll make every effort to weather the storm. If any one of you has an idea on how we can cut costs — no matter how fantastic it may seem — let me know about it. In the days to come every penny saved will count more than you know. The same will be true for any idea to increase the sale of merchandise — anything that will increase our sales will be of great importance. We may survive as a company, but it will be only by the greatest effort and by everyone's putting his shoulder to the wheel. Now let's get down to brass tacks and each one speak right up and give his idea on how we can survive."

It was a rather gloomy meeting. No one felt sure enough of his ideas to propose them as effective measures. For a long moment there was silence, then Hal Baker, George's brother-in-law and the sales manager for the company, broke the silence.

"Mr. Pepperdine, your policy of introducing new merchandise, other than automotive, is proving quite successful," he said. "We are selling, even at this time, several hundred radios each month and I believe our efforts in this line and other lines of goods should be extended, possibly to hardware items and work clothes."

George nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, new cars have been coming more fully equipped every year and the automobile's wearing parts are better and don't need to be replaced as

often. With money scarce, people won't spend it for car extras as readily as for necessary household items and work clothes. In any case, the wider our offering of merchandise the more chance we have of attracting customers.

"We now handle," George went on, "stock in sporting goods, radios and camping equipment. These are, strictly speaking, luxury items, but it's been found that a portion of the public will sometimes buy these articles as readily as necessities. We'll extend our merchandise into every possible field, but with cautious trials of such items in a few stores before we stock all stores."

Then the auditor spoke up. "There are various areas in which savings can possibly be made. For the most part, the savings I have in mind will call for retrenchment, such as closing out stores operating at a loss or on a very slim margin of profit, reducing the personnel and cutting salaries."

George sighed and then smiled reluctantly. "Thank you for these suggestions. I knew someone would make them. And before this depression is over we'll probably have to adopt them, much as I dislike the idea. Will you please make a thorough study of the whole organization in line with your suggestions, and bring us the results. Then step by step, as necessary, we can follow your recommendations."

During the following months unemployment in the country soared, money became more and more scarce and sales declined sharply. It was inevitable that families without work and on short pay would use their limited funds to buy food rather than auto supplies. George was forced to use every possible device to cut expenses. Several stores which were unprofitable were closed.

However, in most locations his company had signed five-year leases on the premises and rent had to be paid even if the stores ceased operations. Whenever possible,

then, the vacated buildings were sub-let, but because of so many business failures it wasn't often that this could be done. In some cases the landlords, realizing the desperate straits, would cooperate by giving a small rent reduction.

Inevitably the day arrived when George was forced to order a reduction in personnel and a cut in salaries for everyone. Many of the loyal employees, appreciating the company problems and understanding the operating losses and remembering the excellent bonuses and profit sharing they had enjoyed in the good years, actually suggested a general wage cut. Salaries in the lower brackets were cut only ten per cent. Some executive salaries were reduced as much as 20 per cent and George himself took a reduction of 50 per cent. However, with all the savings that could be effected the company was still operating at a loss because sales were so low. For quite a while — more than a year, in fact — the organization was operating at a net loss of more than a thousand dollars a day.

How long could he survive under such circumstances? That was the question which obviously rose in George's mind. The company had ample operating capital but with losses running so heavily he knew it would only be a matter of time until their capital would be depleted and he would be forced to close Western Auto Supply Company. Adding to the tense financial situation was the government's demand for inheritance tax on Lena's estate. Her death had come and her estate appraised just before the stock market crash of October 29, 1929. With the crash and resultant depression, George faced paying on inheritance tax which could cost him control of Western Auto. Fortunately, John Sheran was able to negotiate the government demands for inheritance taxes over a period of years.

Also, late in 1933 and 1934, general business took a slight upward swing and more people found jobs, which was soon reflected in increased sales. George watched the

figures creep up gradually to the point where his company was breaking even and finally moved out of the red and into the black column again.

George began to breath more easily. Western Auto had weathered the storm of the great depression while many concerns, equally strong financially had lost the battle. The principal difference was complete cooperation on the part of all employees of the Western Auto Family, was George's firm belief. They realized that the losses of the company placed it in real jeopardy and that the company was doing all it possibly could for its employees. Every man was willing to work as diligently as if the business belonged to him — giving long hours and careful attention to all duties, saving every penny possible during the dreary days and years. George's earlier concentration on the subject of cooperation and family spirit had really paid off in a practical and heart-warming way during the depression years. Because of the sincere spirit of friendship and the policy of fair treatment, along with the bonuses and profit sharing during the good years, Western Auto's management enjoyed rare trust among its employees during the bad years. As a result, there was less turnover and longer average employment than in most other large concerns. This condition prevailed before and after, as well as during, the trying years of the depression.

Western Auto had also built goodwill with several "firsts" in fringe benefits for employees which were not common in those early days. Some of the projects in addition to the bonuses and profit sharing were picnics and social clubs, public speaking and self-improvement classes, correspondence courses in business English, and the employee magazine, "ACCELERATOR." The magazine was a medium for news and exchange of ideas in which employees from all stores and offices could participate. Employees looked forward to the monthly news reports of

promotions, store activity, picnics, vacation trips, weddings, births and other items of a personal nature.

During the depression years retail and wholesale prices were reduced to unreasonably low figures. Raw materials and labor costs were low and all profits were squeezed. Many merchants, suffering from lack of sales, would offer goods at cost or below, just to get in a little money to meet urgent needs.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

George Sells Western Auto

With Lena gone, George plunged almost desperately into the affairs of Western Auto, which demanded much of his time and energy during the depression years. Then, with better times, he began to devote more and more of his thoughts and attention to religious and charitable programs, which always had been such a vital part of his life. And his thoughts centered on stewardship — the question of how best to accomplish the most good in this world with the material blessings he had accumulated.

Everyone enjoyed and welcomed the improvements in economic conditions which appeared as the nation gradually pulled out of the devastating depression. Western Auto sales in the Pacific Coast area gained steadily from 1934 to 1939. Profits again became normal and the Western Auto family was again progressing happily.

George kept getting deeper and deeper into charitable, religious and educational activities, which finally culminated in 1937 with the founding of George Pepperdine College, which will be treated more fully later in this book.

George Pepperdine was realizing, more keenly than ever before, that a large part of his efforts and time should be devoted to the best possible use of the money he had earned

for the benefit of humanity. He had enough activities outside of Western Auto to take all of his time, if all such activities were given the time to which he felt they were entitled. On occasions, he thought seriously about selling his business, although he had made no effort to do so. He realized that men usually continue their careers or businesses throughout their active years, then find it too late to give effective service to the good work they may have dreamed of doing "some day." George planned his later years of life much differently than that.

Thus he was in the proper frame of mind when, in 1939, a proposal was made by Gamble-Skogmo Company of Minneapolis to buy George's controlling interest in Western Auto Supply Company in the eleven western states at a very fair price. They had several hundred auto supply stores in the northern and northwestern states and planned to extend their business to include the Pacific Coast territory. George would have preferred to have sold control to the home company, Western Auto of Kansas City, but they were not ready to buy at that time. They did buy the same interests many years later from Gamble-Skogmo and consolidated all stores from coast to coast into one chain — as George had originally tried to do before the depression.

It caused George Pepperdine great sorrow to give up the business which he had started thirty years earlier from "scratch" in Kansas City. He had built a successful chain of 170 stores (200 including manager owned) after regaining his health in the West and was also supplying a large number of associate stores that used the Western Auto name and bought their goods from the company. George had more than 1000 loyal employees in the western states, many of whom were personal friends. However, he reasoned that " the time to sell a business is when it is going well, making a profit and when you have a good offer." The pressure of other activities and the desire to give the rest

of his life to helping good causes was the deciding factor. He accepted Gamble-Skogmo's offer of $3,000,000.

George Pepperdine was 50 when he "retired," but retirement, of course, only meant a change of direction for his energies. Throughout his lifetime after selling the business George maintained a keen interest in Western Auto. He visited stores whenever it was convenient and on occasion was called upon to officiate at ribbon-cutting ceremonies for new store openings.

In celebrating the Golden Anniversary of the beginning of Western Auto Supply Company, the April, 1959 issue of the company magazine, CIRCLE ARROW, pictured George at a new store opening. The magazine mentioned his activities in the founding and early management of the company.

He always expressed happiness in seeing the success of the company after he left it — seeing the growth of the "Mighty Oak" from the small acorn he planted so many years before.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

The "One and Only Lady"

"That's George Pepperdine," one of the girls whispered excitedly to Helen Louise Davis as the founder of Western Auto Company came into the church auditorium.

Helen was properly impressed at this information, but gave very little more thought to it as the drama being staged by the young people's class at Arlington Christian Church progressed. She was blissfully unaware that the distinguished business and civic leader had his eye on her all evening with more than passing interest.

George Pepperdine and Helen didn't meet that night in 1932 during the program at the church, but George — who decided at first sight that she was the most beautiful person in the world — didn't waste much time bringing about an introduction . . .

Helen Davis at that time thought she was well on her way into a career in photography. She had served her apprenticeship — five years of it — with Eastman Kodak Co. and then joined B. B. Nichols Company, a photographic supply house located near the Y.M.C.A. Building in Los Angeles.

At the time of the church party, however, her future looked a bit uncertain because of the depression. As the

person in charge of the laboratory, she was in a good position to work herself into a partnership if she wanted it. She wanted it, but the economic condition of the country had brought the photographic business to a virtual standstill and the prospect of being a partner in such a precarious business at this time was not as inviting as it had been.

Helen Davis was born in Muncie, Indiana, the daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Harrison L. Davis. Her father spent half a century in practice as a dentist — the first twenty-five years in Muncie and the last half in Los Angeles.

Helen and her sister, Lorraine, who still conducts a pre-school in the little town of Fallbrook in Southern California, grew up in Muncie and went to schools there. Helen remembers her childhood as "happy and carefree" as part of a closeknit family which made trips together in the summertime and enjoyed visiting their grandparents' home overlooking two beautiful bends on the river in Cincinnati, Ohio.

It was Helen's mother who made the decision to move to California. Mrs. Davis didn't want to spend her entire life in Muncie, Indiana, so when relatives came back from California with glowing reports about life in the Golden State, she announced she would like to go there to live. Dr. Davis agreed and on Halloween night of 1919 the family left Chicago for Los Angeles.

Helen was in her last year in high school when the family moved to California. She didn't finish her senior year because of art eye ailment. Although the eye problem left her nearsighted, it didn't keep her from going to work for the Eastman Kodak Co. the same year they arrived in Los Angeles.

The near-sightedness did become the source of a joke later for her boss at B. B. Nichols Company. He'd watch Helen holding photographs close to her eyes as she examined them to check the quality of the printing.

"When Miss Davis gets through smelling those pictures, we'll take them and deliver them," he used to say to anyone else who happened to be around.

George Pepperdine found the eyes of this young lady very large and very attractive that first time he saw her at the church play, to which he had been invited by friends.

Helen was there with two girl friends, Helen Porter and Lela Lowe. As it so happened, George Pepperdine was also acquainted with Helen Porter, daughter of J. C. Porter, whom George supported financially that year in his successful bid (as the choice of Christian Church people) for mayor of Los Angeles. Next day he called Helen Porter.

"Who," he got pretty quickly to the point, "was that sitting by you last night?"

Helen Porter identified her friend.

"How would the two of you like to come by my house and pick some flowers on Saturday?"

George had bought a lovely home on West Adams for his mother. Its yards were filled with beautiful flower gardens.

Helen Porter admitted that would be nice and promised she'd check with Helen Davis.

"Surely," Helen, who loved flowers, agreed.

But, somehow, once they arrived, it came as a surprise to Helen that this busy man would be there in person to show them about the gardens. They picked flowers and talked. George Pepperdine told how his mother loved flowers and how she brightened their home on the Kansas prairie with them when he was a boy. He talked of the trip around the world on which he took his mother in 1929.

Helen Davis went home impressed with the gentle nature and engaging personality of this man, but without the slightest inkling that anything romantic was in the wind.

He showed up at her mother's home at 8 o'clock the

next Monday morning, bringing a set of letters he had written his Western Auto Supply Company employees on his world trip, for her to read.

"I just wondered if you'd like to go to a showing being put on by the Pacific Geographical Society at Ebell Theater?" he said. "We could get Helen Porter and her boy friend to go with us."

Helen agreed to go. The next week he took her to dinner, with the other couple, at the famous old Mission Inn in Riverside and then to the Los Angeles County Fair in Pomona. That was their last "chaperoned" date.

Meanwhile, after learning of the precariousness of the photography business she was in and also discovering that Helen had a keen interest in welfare work, George helped her to get a better paying job with the local church federation. George used to chuckle over it later, because the young lady was totally unaware that the maneuvering he did to get the job for her involved personally paying her salary. The federation, though seriously needing her services, had no funds in the budget for another employee. It was a long time after their marriage before Helen learned that George had pulled this benevolent little stunt for her benefit. In fact, at one point the innocent Helen Davis even complained to George that the meager salary the federation was paying her was not meeting her needs of using her car in her work.

"I use my car constantly," she said, "and there are many other extra expenses I didn't expect."

George soon found it possible to "fix" matters and she got her raise. Of course, this too came out of his own pocket.

Helen took to her new work like the proverbial duck taking to water. For a while her role was as supervisor to needy girls, brought to the office. Then she went into field work — visiting underprivileged girls of poor families in

need of relief. Her list of such homes eventually grew to seventy-one. In the homes of unemployed, where county welfare assistance was not enough, she undertook to provide whatever was needed — whether food, clothes, medical care or just simple loving attention and counsel.

George watched Helen's activities with mounting appreciation of her concern for the unfortunate and the skill with which she ministered to their needs. So serious was she about her work that she took a graduate evening course at the University of Southern California in sociology to better equip herself to handle the job.

George quickly found himself falling deeply in love with her. It was not too long before he began to get the feeling that she was responding to his attention despite the difference in their ages. George was then 46 and Helen was 30.

Helen, he felt certain, was the "one and only lady" for him. Their long talks had disclosed much that he liked about her nature and background. Her devotion impressed him, and he used a few subtle methods of finding out if her interests and beliefs coincided with his own. On the day they were driving back from the fair in Pomona on one of their early dates, George drove past the handsome new Ambassador Hotel on Wilshire Boulevard, he said: "How would you like to go there some night and dance?"

They hadn't talked about dancing, but George Pepperdine, whose religious affiliation frowned on dancing, was testing her, of course.

Helen, who didn't know his religious commitment at the time, nevertheless gave him the answer he wanted. "I don't think so," she said.

Not long after the trip to the fair, George asked Helen to go with him on a drive to Santa Paula to visit several of his stores. They drove up there in George's big LaSalle automobile. On the way he began telling her about his life.

"When we got to Ventura," Helen remembers, "he parked me in a hotel to wait while he took care of his business at the store. When he came back to pick me up he went right on with his story exactly where he had left off, just as if he hadn't left me for two hours."

From Ventura they drove over to Ojai and there they parked on one of the colorful hills around the beautiful little community.

"I knew he wanted to take me in his arms and kiss me, but he didn't," Helen smiles now. "And that night I went home and told mother, 'That man wants a wife.' "

Helen doesn't remember the first time he did kiss her, but she regards the courtship "as romantic and warm and wonderful as anyone could imagine — George was always so sweet and lovable and a gentleman through and through." And she does, of course, remember when he proposed. This became a little involved.

George called for Helen at USC about 9 o'clock one night and drove up into the hills where they could see the city lights. George was unusually quiet. Helen wondered if she'd been a little too rough with him a few days earlier when she'd taken him to task because he was feeling sorry for himself about his health. George believed he was having a lung problem again. Helen didn't think it was that serious and she remonstrated and told him to quit worrying about it and "quit seeing that doctor." Incidentally, he did. But Helen's sharpness was designed to try to snap him out of his doldrums, which had plagued him for some time. Earlier, George's daughter, Florence, visiting from Hawaii, had called Helen and asked her to come over and read to her father because he was feeling so despondent and felt he was not well.

George was really despondent on that night and told Helen his health was "failing." Then he added: "I don't know about my health, so I think maybe we should be just

friends for a while." Helen very emphatically let him know she didn't want to be "just friends."

So it was with that recent background that George picked her up that night at USC and drove up onto the hills of View Park, not yet fully built up. He didn't say much and finally he started the old LaSalle and drove to Helen's home where they sat and talked in the car.

"I was tired," Helen recalls, "and I thought, why doesn't he go on home or let me go in the house. My father had a business guest and George was waiting for him to leave. Finally when the man left I told him I was tired and he told me he wanted to tell me something."

They went into Helen's home and George finally got it out. He proposed after assuring her he had called his daughters together that evening at dinner in his home and asked them what they thought of Helen for his wife. With their enthusiastic blessing, he had decided to pose the question tonight. He had the ring in his pocket.

Helen accepted, but she was also curious. "Why didn't you say something sooner?" she questioned.

"I didn't want to propose to you in the car," he said in complete seriousness.

The next shock that came to Helen was his idea about the date for the wedding.

"Can you be ready in nineteen days?" was his bombshell.

"WHAT?" was about all she could manage at the moment, thinking of her job and all the preparation needed for a wedding.

George's rationale in having the wedding so soon was that he wanted it to take place before he became another year older. So they were married on June 17, 1934, three days before his forty-seventh birthday, in a simple ceremony conducted by a mutual friend, Dr. William C. Pierce, secretary of the International Sunday School Association, in her parents home on a Sunday afternoon.

George found out on his honeymoon what a gem of a wife he had won. They spent their wedding night in the bridal suite of the Huntington Hotel in Pasadena. Next morning they had breakfast sent up to their room. This bit of luxury was not especially designed for the comfort and convenience of relaxing newlyweds, instead, Helen had some reports to do for her job and they needed the time. She dictated reports of her work to George and he then typed them up to mail in to her office. George remembered he had forgotten to pay the minister so he wrote out a check and a note and dispatched that also.

They then drove on up to the Ahwanee Inn at Yosemite Valley. The $12 they had to pay each day for lodging and meals shocked Helen, not being used to such extravagance.

"I thought it was awful," she says.

She was even more shocked when they drove on down to Palm Springs and stayed in a new hotel that cost them $22 a night.

"I put up with it two days," she laughs now, "and then I said, 'let's get out of here, quickly.' "

That practical approach about wasting money launched a remarkable 28-year marriage of Helen Davis to multi-millionaire George Pepperdine. Happily, this attitude was destined to serve her well when troubles rocked their financial situation years later in their marriage.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

"It Wasn't My Money"

Helen Pepperdine's natural inclination toward benevolence and her experience in social work fit in beautifully with her husband's own philosophy about Christian stewardship. Always generous with the needy, the struggling church, the underpaid missionary, George Pepperdine now had a sympathetic and dynamic helper in this area which he had always considered so vital.

Throughout his lifetime, George had a strong sense of stewardship. As a young man he had wanted to preach, but his lack of education and retiring and shy personality prevented him from doing this. As a boy and young man he learned to give of his income to the church, and that portion came first. Even when he was earning $2.50 a week, he gave a tenth of his gross income to the church. When his business success came, his giving multiplied. Eventually he gave all that he had.

George Pepperdine gave because he enjoyed giving. He gave because he believed, as he said later in his memoirs, "Man's mission on earth is to bear fruit for the Master, to praise and glorify God, to serve Him by serving our fellowman."

George was able to "bear fruit" by making money and he believed firmly that this was a gift from God. As such,

he reasoned, the money had only been entrusted to him as a means of serving God by serving his fellowman through the use of it.

"When I saw for the first time that I was to be what the world called a rich man," George told a magazine writer one time, "I took it seriously rather than jubilantly. There crept over me a new sense of responsibility. In that moment I felt a calling just as real, I think, as a minister feels a 'call' to preach. I felt a calling to a ministry of money."

As he talked to the writer, he paused, anxious to keep from appearing a mere pietist. Then he added slowly: "I don't often talk about this 'experience' of mine because so few understand. They just think you're trying to add a religious glow to the possession of what they somehow feel is inherently a little wicked. They can't conceive of wealth as being other than worldly."

Then George Pepperdine paused again and added the sentence that summed up his total philosophy about the subject: "But, you see, it wasn't my money — it was the Lord's."

While many who knew the man over the years pondered how such faith and selflessness became his way of life, there was no great mystery about it in the mind of George Pepperdine. He traced it directly back to his childhood and his rearing in a God-fearing and loving home.

"When Mother cut a pie for our family of five," he reflected in later life, "there would always be one piece smaller than the others. Mother always took that smaller piece — and in a very quiet, unobtrusive way. I know this may seem like a little thing, but to a young growing boy with a sweet tooth for pie, this seemed like the ultimate in unselfishness."

George, in a lifetime of giving, also followed in the footsteps of his mother by "cutting his pie" in a very quiet and

unobtrusive way. Naturally, because of the sheer volume of his gifts to churches, individuals and charity, his deeds became known. But George gave much in secret that no one knows about to this day.

"He never wanted to take credit for anything," Helen remembers. "Even today, I am inhibited by his feelings on that score because when I do something nice for somebody and feel pretty good about it, I get to thinking to myself: 'Helen, you're not going to get credit for that in heaven if you take credit now."

George had been interested in charitable and philanthropic causes long before their marriage. During the depression years of the first half of the 1920s, he became even more absorbed with the desperate plight of people in need, and he gave generously even though his own business had felt the impact of the hard economic times. So, when Helen, who was already involved in benevolent work, became his wife, this provided a new dimension for this area of his service to his fellowman.

George's first devotion was at this time — and always had been and always would be — to the church. He helped other causes, but it was in the realm of Christianity that he gave most liberally. When profits began to appear again as economic conditions improved, before he sold Western Auto, he contributed to the opening of new congregations of the Churches of Christ in the Rocky Mountains and on the Pacific Coast. In some instances he paid part or all of the salaries of the ministers; to others he gave funds for church buildings. At one time he was helping about forty small new churches at the same time.

He also supported foreign missions and missionaries. Typical of the many missionaries who knew George Pepperdine in his generosity is Harry Robert Fox Sr., who served sixteen years (1919-1935) as one of the pioneer Churches of Christ missionaries in Japan.

In 1928, while taking his mother on a round-the-world trip, George visited the missionaries in Japan. While there, he and his mother stayed three nights with the Fox family. From there Harry Robert and George traveled to three other mission points in the rural areas of Japan. One day they met with all the missionaries at the home of E. A. Rhodes.

"At Brother Rhodes' he gave us a pep talk," Brother Fox remembers, "and said if we ever got into financial trouble to let him know. I know he helped Brother Rhodes start a kindergarten in Japan and he helped others over there, including my brother, Herman Fox, build a church house, and when I came home from Japan in 1935 — broken in health — he really helped me."

George had heard of Brother Fox' health problem — a sciatic condition — so when the latter arrived in Honolulu with his family, on their way home by ship, there was a letter from George Pepperdine waiting for him. It suggested the name of a doctor in Los Angeles that George wanted him to see. And he offered to pay for whatever treatment was necessary.

The treatments went on for two years and George paid the bills until Brother Fox had recovered from the painful problem. In fact, he began to feel better not long after the treatments were started and by 1936 he felt he was able to return to preaching. He preached at the Central Church of Christ, where George was then a member, during a gap in the ministries there of Batsell Baxter and G. C. Brewer. Then, in September of 1936, he was offered the pulpit at the church in Fullerton — at a salary of $15 a week. Naturally, with seven children, even a family used to the bare subsistence of a missionary's pay in Japan, could not hope to live on $15 a week. So George Pepperdine came to the rescue and added $20 a week to that every week for the next three years.

"That was the kind of a man he was," said Brother

Fox, "and no telling how many more people he helped in that way."

But Harry Robert Fox also remembers George Pepperdine as a man who was remarkably careful and conscientious with his money in other ways.

"I was riding with him one day when he stopped for gas and an error of a penny or two — I don't recall in whose favor — was made when the man gave him his change," remembers Brother Fox. "He just held that change out there in front of the gas station man until he saw his mistake. That impressed me. He was an extremely generous man but he wanted things to be RIGHT. And he didn't believe in wasting money, either. He took me out to lunch several times and he always went to an ordinary place to eat instead of some high priced place where some would expect a man of his financial status to go. Of course, this was all just part of his good stewardship."

All who knew George Pepperdine recall similar incidents which reflect his thrift on the one hand and his extraordinary generosity on the other.

Walter King, a Pepperdine alumnus of the early days, later business manager for Pepperdine College and now director of off-street parking for the City of Los Angeles, was always impressed by George Pepperdine's personal regard toward his wealth.

"He was the kind of man who had very little use for money except as a means of helping others," Walter King said. "He never wanted to spend money on himself. His attitude was the kind that reasons: after all, a man can only wear one suit at a time, so why have two. Naturally, he had more clothes than that because he had to, but he didn't spend more than he needed on himself.

"Mr. Pepperdine had a fondness for automobiles, but even here he practiced thrift," King went on. "I'll never forget that old V-12 Packard he had. He loved that old

car and he used to say to me: 'Listen to that motor — it's really talking.' And how he babied that car. He wouldn't trust it to a service station — changed his own oil and he even had a grease pit in his garage on West Adams Street — to service the car."

How many churches and individuals George Pepperdine helped over the years even his widow doesn't know.

"I do know," Helen recalls, "that he paid G. C. Brewer's salary all the time he was at Central, and he paid the salaries of other preachers there. He also helped his own family. He gave $100,000 for a Boy Scout camp at Jackson Lake and later helped with Camp Pepperdine in the San Bernardino Mountains. He gave $50,000 to Harding College one time before he started Pepperdine. That was the time that George Benson, then a missionary to China, was called back to 'save Harding' and he came to George for help. He helped build the Southwest church in Los Angeles and many other church buildings here and elsewhere. Giving to the church permeated his whole life, but he was very secretive about it and that is why there is no way of knowing the extent of his generosity."

Helen remembers that his criterion for giving to his brethren was very uncomplicated.

"If anyone was a member of the church," she said, "George accepted him without question. If he needed help, he helped him without question. Sometimes, because of this blind faith in a brother, he was badly imposed upon, but he never regretted it even when he tried to do something good and it failed."

Martin Christensen Sr., owner of Western Insurance Company, saw some of these failures, and many successes in his years of association with George Pepperdine.

"Chris" met George at a church function shortly after he was discharged from the service at the end of World

War I and was working for Security Bank. Later he became secretary of the Pepperdine Foundation.

"When I went with the Foundation I was amazed — everybody and his brother wanted money," Chris remembers, "and Mr. Pepperdine was available to talk to many of these people, especially members of the church."

Chris recalls George's telling him once: "I feel an obligation to give a man part of my time if he goes to the trouble and takes the time to come and see me."

One brother, Chris remembers, came in one day with a hard luck story about how he had failed in getting support as a missionary and now needed some help to make a fresh start here at home. He wanted to buy an apartment house and wondered if Mr. Pepperdine would make the down payment for him. Mr. Pepperdine did, but he chose the building — a four-story one, instead of the six-story structure the good brother had in mind.

Chris remembers that even in his help of churches, George sometimes would only go part of the way toward their requests on the theory that a gift from him should serve as a pace-setter or the "seed money" to start a program toward self-sufficiency.

How his business acumen helped the church was demonstrated one time in 1936 when George sent "Chris" up to Banning, California with instructions: "Chris, the church is in a bind there — go out and see if you can formulate a program to get them out of their dilemma."

Chris drove to Banning and met with one of the elders, who explained that they had built a basement for the church and then had run out of money and credit. He took Chris out to show him the recently completed basement. He told Chris the story of how much they had spent and how much was still needed. He said there was a mechanic's lien on the property for some outstanding bills. Chris returned to George with his report.

"All right," George quickly decided, "we'll finance this until the time the lien has expired. Then we'll help them get a loan from the bank that they can handle."

By the time the loan was applied for, the bank readily agreed to finance the building, thanks to George's putting it into a sound risk situation.

Chris can talk for hours about the great things George Pepperdine did. But he remembers little things, too, which reflect the complex character of this man.

For example, he had a keen sense of humor and always enjoyed a good laugh.

"Once," Chris chuckled, "we were on a trip up to Arrowhead Lake and Mr. Pepperdine really got a chuckle out of a sign we passed in front of a shack selling fish bait. It said: 'I got worms.' "

Chris tells this story as it was related to him by the late John Allen Hudson: "Brother Hudson said when he was preaching at the Southwest church he had decided to go before the elders at one time to ask for a raise. He concluded his request with the threat, 'If I don't get my raise I'm going to leave,' whereupon, George Pepperdine one of the elders, promptly and calmly reacted, 'When, John, are you going to leave?' " but he didn't.

"Mr. Pepperdine was a completely calm person," Chris recalls, "I remember one time I was riding with him and a woman driver almost ran into us. Her car was coming directly toward us. Mr. Pepperdine swerved his car and the door came open and for a few seconds there we were in trouble, but he expertly avoided the situation and he never said a word before, during or afterward about it."

Chris paused, remembering, then added simply: "He was different from us."

When Helen Louise Davis married this "different" man she, too, became an integral part of his giving ways. But even Helen never realized the full extent of his bene-

volences. After their marriage he held up a stack of letters one day and said, "I hope you can take care of these requests that come to me. That is one of your responsibilities now."

Many of the requests were stereotypes, of course, and easy for her to dispose of. The others she screened and the ones that seemed the most urgent and in keeping with his beliefs, she turned back to George.

"He would then just go ahead and fill the requests without comment or without even reporting back to me what he had done," Helen says.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

The George Pepperdine Foundation

It was four years before his marriage to Helen that George set up a foundation to serve as an agency to better channel his gifts. Until then, he had handled his program of giving on more or less a "hit and miss" basis.

As suggested earlier, his first interest was in the church, but George recognized important needs in other areas of charity and he was particularly drawn to the needs of youth. He had always been interested in young people. The sight of boys playing on dirty streets or running in groups in alleys struck at his heart.

George believed that basically, there is no such thing as an incurably bad boy. A boy who got into trouble, in his viewpoint, was one who was misguided by parents, chums or environment. Much trouble came upon boys, he felt, because of a youth's natural inclination to experiment, their inquisitiveness and their youthful spirit. As he expressed it often, "Boys aren't really bad. Give them plenty to eat, time to play, some interesting hobby or work to keep them busy and they stop being bad boys."

On that theory, George was interested in any program which gave promise of bettering the chances of poor, underprivileged children. Any group activity where they could be taught useful crafts, better citizenship and how to become socially constructive engaged his sympathetic attention and support.

His initial effort in the direction of aiding the training of boys was through the Y.M.C.A. in 1927. There were practically no youth programs in the southwest area of Los Angeles — nothing comparable to the city playground programs of today. While the Y.M.C.A. activities were then restricted to the downtown area, there were officials in the "Y" who were aware of the need of the outlying areas of the city. Especially interested in the southwest area were Homer Gould, Boys Work secretary, and Loren Bell, a field man for the Y.M.C.A. These men knew that the "Y" did not have funds to fill their needs, but they undertook to find a patron who would aid the program. In George they found their man.

As a preliminary step, Mr. Bell planned to rent a small building in the southwest area to serve as a focal point for Y.M.C.A. activities. In the vicinity of 59th Street and Vermont Avenue a small dwelling was rented. George paid the rental and part of the salary of a counselor for the program. The main activity centered around the training of boys from 8 to 14 by volunteer work of interested men. The youngsters were organized into a group called "Friendly Indians." Mr. Bell led them in handicraft work, training in citizenship and wholesome recreation. George, who regarded this type of activity as character building rather than religious, watched the results of the experiment with interest. On the whole, he felt that this sort of constructive program, which took boys off the streets and put them into wholesome group association, was of great value.

Several years later George financed the "Pepperdine Scout Reservation" — camp facilities for many troops in the Big Pines area at Jackson Lake in the Sierra Madre Mountains. Here, hundreds of Boy Scouts enjoyed outings under the supervision of their Scoutmasters. The boys were delighted with the swimming, mountain hiking and

camping. Later this camp was sold and the money used to help develop the larger Boy Scouts camping area near Arrowhead Lake.

George was deeply impressed with the constructive results of the Boy Scout program. He liked the Scout Law, which teaches the boys to be "trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, reverent." He liked the Scout Oath, which pledges each boy: "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; to help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally alert, and morally straight." He liked the Scout Slogan — "Be Prepared," which constantly reminds the boys to meet any kind of circumstances they may have to face.

George believed that Scouts became better citizens because of the patriotism, good citizenship and good character traits emphasized in the program. He believed that the "for God and country" phrase in their oath has a vital influence on the lives of the young men.

Because of his keen interest and help in the Scout program, George served for many years on the executive board of the Los Angeles Area Council and as a national council member of Boy Scouts of America.

As he began to get more and more involved in benevolent work, George began to realize the need for an agency to administer his giving. Because of the strictly congregational nature of the Churches of Christ, which rigidly eschews any sort of central organization over the congregations, there was no existing means whereby George could be sure that his gifts for charitable work, in every instance, were doing the most good or were going where they were most needed.

Thus it was that in 1931, after long meditation, he decided to establish a foundation through which he could

channel his gifts and where income and earnings would be tax free. He had no major project in mind just then, other than the church, and, indeed, because of the depression at that time in history he had no surplus funds, but he was looking to the future — to the time when prosperity would plow back profits into the business arteries of America and then the foundation would flourish. Until that day he would gradually donate some of his stock in Western Auto to begin the endowment for a foundation, feeling certain that it would produce substantial dividends after the depression ended.

George had always felt very strongly that one's wealth should not be hoarded and, likewise, that one should give wisely. In his case, this meant that he should look to the future and try to discover the best means to channel his gifts for the benefit of humanity. He was fully determined that he would not pass on a large fortune to his heirs. By establishing a foundation, he could also legally prevent taxes from devouring his wealth through inheritance taxes, he reasoned.

After he reached his decision, George had his attorney, John Sheran, draw up the necessary legal document establishing the foundation. In the charter of the George Pepperdine Foundation, three purposes were set forth: to make gifts to religious, charitable and educational organizations. The first board of trustees consisted of George, his mother and R. C. Cooper, an elder in the Southwest Church of Christ.

Between 1931 and 1933 there were no dividends from Western Auto. Indeed, George operated his corporation during these dark days at a heavy loss. However, as soon as business began to improve the Foundation received dividends from the substantial block of stock with which he endowed it, and it began to make small gifts to various charitable and character building institutions.

CHAPTER THIRTY

The Woman's Touch in Philanthropy

George Pepperdine said it best of Helen, "that she complimented all facets of his life." "I am grateful to my wife, Helen," he penned in his memoirs at the age of 73. "She has been a blessing, a joy and a dynamo of helpful energy since our marriage in 1934. Not only is she a lovely lady, a faithful and loving wife, and the mother of our three children, but she is also a tireless and intelligent worker in college and church activities. She has performed admirably as a member of the Board of Trustees of the college and as a leader of the Faculty Wives Club and the Mothers Club. I thank God for the day I met her and for all the days in which she has brought happiness and strength into my life. God bless her."

As "first lady" of Western Auto, Helen was not long in finding favor among George's business associates. One of her first duties in this role was to act as hostess for a dinner in their home for about forty Western Auto people.

George, as he always had done in the past, had the big meal catered, although his bride had protested that she could do the cooking. When she saw the bill, she put her foot down.

"That's the last time we'll cater a dinner," she firmly told her husband, and for the rest of their years together

Helen kept that promise. When Western Auto folk gathered at their home, Helen prepared the meals herself, and it was the same whether for a few friends or a hundred people from Pepperdine College — she was the "head chef" in her kitchen. Her skill at cooking and baking had become well known.

Helen continued her social work in the early days of their marriage as the need for her services was very great. She made her calls regularly at the homes of the underprivileged, where often she would outfit the small children with new, inexpensive clothing to replace the wornout garments. Helen, with a few small, ill-clad children in tow, became a familiar and welcome customer in the bargain basements of certain department stores, where special prices were gladly given for such a good cause, and the children were returned home "tickled pink" with their new outfits. At times, where the need was especially great, she would appear at many of the homes with a large supply of food to supplement the meager diet supplied by some welfare relief agency. Unemployed and destitute people were grateful to receive such voluntary gifts, and she was happy to have a part in bringing such relief — a happiness shared by George, who personally paid for all of the things distributed by his wife.

Helen continued her social welfare work for about a year after the marriage. She worked, in fact, until just a few months before the birth of their daughter, Marilyn.

In the spring of 1936, when the baby was several months old, George and Helen, accompanied by a nurse to care for little Marilyn, went on a trip which covered eleven western states in a new seven-passenger Buick. George laughingly referred to the trip as "our 10,000-mile honeymoon," although factually was a business trip for the purpose of visiting the Western Auto Supply Stores.

On the swing through this vast area, George held

twenty-five sales meetings for employees in the various districts. On the trip they visited ninety stores and stopped at fifty different hotels. Helen heroically did her part as the wife of the president — as George met with the men, Helen would entertain the wives of managers and salesmen at a luncheon or tea at the best local hotel.

"The worst part was eating nothing but restaurant food," laughs Helen. "I could hardly wait to get back for food prepared in my own kitchen."

The trip, while a strenuous one, gave George an opportunity to see at first hand the progress each store was making, get better acquainted with the personnel and observe business conditions throughout the West. Since 1934 there had been a gradual upswing from the depth of the depression which had gripped the country after the crash of 1929. Slowly the economy was improving, employment was increasing and people were able to spend money again on their automobiles.

Western Auto sales rose steadily. By the end of 1936 the annual volume had reached approximately $14,000,000 in the eleven Western states, which was equal to the peak year of the boom in the late twenties. This provided profits to help offset some of the heavy losses of the depression and make conditions more comfortable for George and his organization.

November 29, 1936 was a happy day for George and Helen when their first son, George II, was born. Their first baby was a girl and both of George's children by his first marriage were girls, so it was a great day of rejoicing for Daddy, then past fifty years old, when his namesake was born. Their second son, Wendell, was born in 1941.

The years 1936 to 1939 were prosperous. George and Helen were very happy and very busy. Without neglecting the Western Auto Family in entertaining groups of em-

ployees, or in visiting stores, they were giving an increasing amount of time to charitable, religious and educational activities.

When George sold his controlling interest in Western Auto Stores in the eleven western states, as related in a previous chapter, and was relieved of the heavy responsibilities that went with the presidency of a large chain of stores, he still had plenty to do. He had a number of investments to watch and the Foundation activities to supervise, which included the operation of twelve large apartment houses, although his main interest still centered around his charitable, religious and educational programs.

George had served since 1928 as a member of the board of Pacific Lodge Boys home and helped it financially from time to time. He believed the home was doing a constructive, character-building work, as evidenced by the lives of many boys who became fine citizens after a few years of wholesome training.

Pacific Lodge Boys Home consisted of a forty-two acre farm in the San Fernando Valley, with buildings, horses, cows, hogs, gardens and equipment to care for sixty boys. The lodge operated under a license from the State Department of Social Service of the City of Los Angeles. The boys came from the Los Angeles County Probation Department and other welfare agencies. There were also private placements in the home, not for bad boys, only for some who were "caught."

The Home drew its support largely from the Community Chest, the County Probation office and public and private donations. It was the aim of the founders of the Lodge to provide the best possible environment for boys 10 to 14 years of age who, for one reason or another, had gone astray or who were from broken homes. The boys enjoyed a well rounded program of activity, including work in classrooms, fields, gardens and barns.

Helen's interest in charitable and social work remained keen and early in 1937 she and George founded a similar home for girls. Called the Helen Louise Girls' Home, it was opened to Protestant, non-delinquent girls whose homes had been broken up by separation, divorce or death of their parents. The Home was a large, beautiful, fifteen-room residence at 1238 South Westmoreland in Los Angeles and had facilities to take care of twenty-two girls at a time.

To qualify for residence in the Helen Louise Home, girls had to be between the ages of fifteen and nineteen years. Only mentally normal girls, able to pass a strict medical examination, were admitted. They all graduated from public high schools and some were sent on to college.

Since a few of the girls were emotionally upset because of their broken homes, two house-mothers, especially trained for such work, were on duty in the home at all times. The lady in charge of the home, Laura Griffin, gave the girls guidance in home-making and attempted to create as nearly a normal home situation as possible.

The girls were asked to pay a stated boarding rate, but this was adjusted to meet the circumstances. In most instances the full cost was borne by the George Pepperdine Foundation. Helen spent a great deal of time in the Home, giving unstintingly of her advice and love to the girls, until the Home was discontinued during the World War II years. It was never reopened due to better employment opportunities for the girls and their families.

Even after starting Pepperdine College in 1937, George and Helen continued to be active in other benevolent work.

George remained on the board of Pacific Lodge Boys Home for 35 years and, in 1939, he and Helen became members of the board of trustees of Casa Colina Convalescent Home for Crippled Children. This institution, a private philanthropic enterprise, was founded in 1938 by a group of men and women interested in aiding children

crippled by polio and heart disease, which were very prevalent in those days.

It was the desire of the founders to give to children, crippled by infantile paralysis the post-hospitalization care which they would otherwise miss because of financial needs. The board of trustees set up a very nominal fee of $60 per month for the patients, but many of the children came from homes where the parents were unable to pay anything. The rates had to be advanced steeply in later years and is still operating under a new name.

Both George and Helen regarded this work with the various organizations as an opportunity to render real service. Their fruitful achievements during this period of the thirties, when the depression ruined so many family fortunes was especially satisfying. George's vision of service to mankind and his devotion to charitable and educational endeavors placed him in the foremost ranks of philanthropists, and in a very tangible manner reflected his beliefs in his stewardship as his "brother's keeper."

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Idea for College Conceived

Few men at the age of 50 become obsessed with how to go about giving away their money. Comparatively few men of any age let this become a problem in their lives, but that was the main concern of George Pepperdine when he reached the half-century mark.

It was in 1936 that he began in earnest to search for a solution to the problem about building something lasting with his worldly goods. By that time the economic conditions of the country had begun to improve following the worst depression years and George, still owner of Western Auto at the time, knew his Foundation soon would have substantial funds at its disposal.

"By Christmas time of 1936, we had about come to a decision," Helen Pepperdine remembers. "We had talked about an old people's home and had gone over all the things the Foundation was already supporting, but George was interested in young people, and so was I, so we kept coming back to the question of how we could best help youth."

George spent much time in prayer over the matter. "Whatever we do," he said, "it has to be right. If I wait upon the Lord, all in His good time, I'll be led into the right course."

It was early in 1937 that his prayers of faith received an answer. The idea of founding a Christian college was born in conversation with Hugh M. Tiner, a young educator George knew. Tiner, who was active in the Churches of Christ, was a supervisor for high schools in Los Angeles County at the time.

George disclosed to Tiner that he had set up the Foundation and that he expected its assets to grow substantially. He reviewed the charitable causes, other than the church, that he had been supporting and indicated that he felt none of them really represented exactly what he felt would be the best long term investment for his fortune. The subject got around to education and George expressed his alarm over the many young Christians who were losing their faith in state institutions of higher learning.

"I have noticed," he told Tiner, "that your life is devoted to the Lord and you are the product of a Christian college."

Tiner, a graduate of Abilene Christian College in Abilene, Texas, agreed that state educational systems were not designed to sustain religious faith.

"Do you suppose," George asked him, "that we could do something in the framework of education without becoming strictly a Christian college?"

George's reticence about a "strictly Christian college" came out of his own religious background. As a youth, many members of the Churches of Christ felt that Bible education should be confined to the home and the church and thus they frowned on established "Bible schools." George grew up among those of that persuasion. So, instead of envisioning a "Christian college" per se, they talked about a college offering "the best academic training in a Christian environment."

Tiner, during interviews for this book, conceded: "That is a pretty fine point. But you have to remember that at

that time Mr. Pepperdine even had doubts about making Bible teaching and chapel a part of the program. He felt this would bring criticism from some of the brethren."

Tiner told of the time he made a point with Mr. Pepperdine which dispelled his doubts about the Christian college emphasis. It came during one of their meetings to discuss the college and Mr. Pepperdine was telling Dr. Tiner about one of his employees baptizing a fellow worker at Western Auto.

"If you can do it through Western Auto," Tiner suggested, "then why can't you do it through a college?"

George Pepperdine quickly saw the point. When Pepperdine College was established, required Bible studies were a part of the curriculum and chapel was a daily program on campus. Moreover, George soon was calling his namesake a "Christian" college in his writings and speeches and did so to the end of his days, although he was also careful to stipulate that the school was not a part of the church.

"We want to operate," he said in an early speech to students, after the college was started, "not as an adjunct of the church, but as an extension of the work of the Christian home in providing higher education under such influence as will strengthen and deepen your faith in God."

When the idea of establishing a Christian college began to take shape, George approached it cautiously. Fired by Tiner's enthusiasm and vision, his thoughts began to take a positive direction, but he moved slowly. He thought of his own life. It had been rich, satisfying and successful, but how much more rewarding his life might have been had he been able to acquire a college education.

Still he wrestled with every angle. He continued to talk to Hugh Tiner. They began to envision a college on the West Coast similar to Tiner's Alma Mater — "a college which would provide a Christian environment, employ

dedicated professors with a profound faith in God, and provide a sound curriculum which would reflect high ideals in every area."

His discussions with Tiner usually ended with the conclusion: "I would like to think about it a little more and pray about it a great deal."

"Right," Tiner would reply, "we don't want to run ahead of God."

It was a daily topic at home. "What do YOU think?" he would often ask Helen.

"I think a Christian college is fine, although I know very little about founding Christian Colleges," would be her reply.

George talked to ministers, business acquaintances and friends. He found everyone liked the concept. He was almost committed to the project when he and Tiner were meeting one day to again discuss the college. "I know you still have many questions in your mind, Mr. Pepperdine," Tiner said. "I can't answer all of them, but I know a man who can. He has a wide experience in this field. I'd like for you to talk to him."

George was interested. "Who is that, Hugh?"

"Dr. Batsell Baxter," Tiner said.

He went ahead to explain that Dr. Baxter had served as president of both Abilene Christian College and David Lipscomb College in Nashville, Tennessee.

"Hmmm," George pondered. "Yes, I've heard of him. He is a sound man — I think I'd trust his judgment."

"I know him very well," Tiner went on. "Dr. Baxter was president of ACC when I attended there. He has been a teacher and administrator since 1912. I don't know any man better qualified to advise you."

George was sold. "I believe you're right. Do you think Dr. Baxter would come out here?"

"Nothing like asking," Tiner said. "Write him and

invite him out. You can go over the whole field of Christian education with him, and then you can decide what you want to do."

"I believe I'll do it," George said with sudden decisiveness. "Don't get your hopes up too much, but I'll probably be guided a lot by what Dr. Baxter says."

"You couldn't depend on better advice," Tiner said. "If he advises against a college, I'll be satisfied that it's best not to establish one."

"That's my feeling too," George said. "I'll let you know as soon as I have an answer."

"Good — I think he'll come out."

Tiner's opinion proved to be right and it wasn't long before Dr. Baxter sent an affirmative answer.

"I am delighted to hear that you are thinking of founding a Christian college," he wrote to George. "I'll be happy to give you the best advice within my power."

Dr. Baxter promised to be in Los Angeles within a few days. When Hugh Tiner introduced Dr. Baxter and George, the latter was immediately favorably impressed. Dr. Baxter was a neat and scholarly looking man. He was quiet and thoughtful and listened with great earnestness to what was said. When it was necessary for him to speak he did so with a facile ability and insight which showed that he fully understood the situation.

After the three men were seated, Dr. Baxter smiled a nervous little smile, which was characteristic of him, and said, "So you are thinking of establishing a college, Mr. Pepperdine. Just what did you have in mind?"

George smiled ruefully. "That's the whole trouble, Dr. Baxter. I don't know exactly what I want. I know one or two things I don't want. I don't want another college that will be dependent upon the churches for support. Basically, I have in mind a four-year liberal arts college — an institution of higher learning where any worthy boy

or girl, regardless of religion, race or financial standing, can get an education. I want it to be a college academically sound, based on Christian faith. Is that too much to ask?"

Dr. Baxter smiled. "I couldn't think of a more worthy goal. I have one question. How do you plan to finance such an institution? It will cost a great deal of money."

"I know that," George said. "I've established a foundation which would furnish the initial cost and supply a good part of the annual budget."

Dr. Baxter nodded. "Then I see no problem which we can't solve."

He reached for his briefcase and withdrew some sheets of paper. "Now let us get down to facts and see just what we can work out."

On a blank sheet of paper Dr. Baxter wrote: "A four-year liberal arts Christian college."

Then he smiled at his companions. "There. That is a beginning. Now let's fill in the page."

It was indeed the beginning of Pepperdine College.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Pepperdine College is Born

If George Pepperdine was slow in determining to build a college, he didn't let any grass grow under his feet once the decision was made.

As he said goodnight to Dr. Baxter and Tiner after their marathon session to discuss the proposed college, George said: "You've convinced me that not only can I found a college, but that I SHOULD do so. Now we must decide where to locate it and get it into operation as quickly as possible."

The intensity and urgency of his words caused the two educators to look at one another in consternation.

"When," Tiner ventured, "do you have in mind opening the college?"

George dropped the bombshell. "In September."

"You mean THIS year?"

"Yes."

"But this is already February," Hugh said weakly.

"I know," George said with a smile, "So we don't have any time to lose."

As the men walked to the car, Dr. Baxter remarked to his young companion: "An extraordinary man. No wonder he is a millionaire."

"Yes, and he means it about opening in September," Hugh said, his mind still spinning at the sudden acceler-

ation of events. "He'll do it, too, somehow. He has a terrific drive." It was good that he did.

One of the immediate problems was the matter of finances. George knew it would require several hundred thousands of dollars to buy land and erect the first group of buildings. This would require selling Western Auto stock, yet he didn't want to sell so much that the transaction would depress a market already experiencing a small turnover each day on the Stock Exchange. So the need for initial financing was worked out by selling a small amount of stock, borrowing money from banks against Western Auto stock as collateral and raising some funds in other ways.

"I was with him," recalled Martin Christensen, "the day he wrote the first check for the college — $950,000 — and he wrote it without batting an eye. He didn't call in a bunch of newspaper people to tell the world about it either."

Meanwhile, the search for land for the new campus was started the very day after the meeting with Dr. Baxter and Tiner. With Helen acting as chauffeur, the search began.

"We went out to Monterey Park," Helen remembers. "We drove up into Baldwin Hills — this was before any houses were built up there. We looked at land in many of the suburban areas, but George kept saying that we had to get closer in to the city where students would have more work opportunities. Then we found the Connally property and we knew that was it."

This tract of land in the southwest section of the city, between Normandie and Vermont Avenues and 78th and 79th Streets, contained 34 acres in a strip 600 feet wide by about one-fourth mile long. It had been part of a large ranch before the city built out that far, but now was surrounded by small modern homes which extended several miles

beyond the property. The large ranch home still stands in the center of a huge yard shaded by a variety of fine, towering trees. A palm-lined carriage driveway entered the property at Vermont Avenue and into the yard of the home. To the south of the drive near the entrance was a swampy area that had been used as a duck pond.

This property belonged to the Connally estate, which was in the process of liquidation. The land was neglected and weed grown. The ranch house, a veritable old mansion, was in need of repairs, as was a large carriage house, which was to become a garage and caretaker's living quarters.

As far as George was concerned, the best feature of the property was its availability to the downtown area where students could find jobs. The street cars traveling along Vermont stopped at the carriage drive, which was later to become known as The Promenade of the college.

Students would have ready access to the public Library and cultural institutions such as the Philharmonic Auditorium, the opera and museums, and other cultural attractions. With the exception of the University of Southern California, there was only one other four-year college in the entire southwest area of the city at the time. Thus the new college would have a large area to serve. There were four large high schools nearby. Public transportation was good in the area and there was a fine shopping center within walking distance of the proposed campus.

After carefully considering all the advantages, George and his associates decided to buy the property at a cost of approximately $150,000. The deal was quickly concluded with the Connally brother and sister who were still living in their old home.

"Now let's build a college," George remarked, and set about to do just that with his characteristic energy.

The deal for the land was readily concluded and a contract for construction of four buildings was made with

John M. Cooper, who promised all possible speed in an attempt to be ready for the opening of school in September of that year. Work was started on construction of a three-story administration building, which was to double as a classroom building; a dining hall and two residence halls; one for women and the other for men.

John Cooper, an architect as well as a builder, designed the structures. He visited various colleges and universities and then worked out his plans for the new college. The designs were extremely modern, with the widest use of glass windows. They met with instant approval from George and his associates.

With Dr. Baxter scheduled to become Pepperdine College's first president, it was necessary for him to return to his post at David Lipscomb College to make arrangements for someone to take over his duties there. Along with that, he was busy contacting professors he knew in all parts of the country in order to assemble a faculty for the opening of school in September. Meanwhile, Hugh Tiner, as dean of the new school, was working closely with George Pepperdine.

The task was prodigious and would have appalled anyone with less enthusiasm and energy than George and the new dean. However, they threw themselves into the job without stint and made tremendous progress with all the details.

When Dr. Baxter returned in May, he too, had encouraging news to report. A skeleton faculty force had been engaged. They were dedicated and capable men and women, drawn from various parts of the United States. Widely acquainted in California, Dean Tiner had valuable suggestions for the selection of a staff.

George rented temporary office quarters in the Chamber of Commerce Building in downtown Los Angeles and shortly President Baxter "and Dean Tiner, with a small

staff, were installed there. It had been decided, appropriately enough, to call the new' institution George Pepperdine College. The founder had been opposed to naming the college after himself, preferring some general name, but upon strong urging from President Baxter and others he finally agreed to allow his name to be perpetuated in this manner.

In June the first bulletin from the new college was issued. At the same time, wide publicity was gained through local newspapers. Large ads were inserted in church publications inviting students from all areas of the country to seek admission to the new college.

Soon, aspiring students began to show up at the temporary offices. Here President Baxter, Dean Tiner or Registrar J. Herman Campbell conducted interviews. Letters of inquiry began to come in from all parts of the U.S. Before September it was clear to the college administrators that there would be plenty of students when the day of registration arrived. Indeed, as the weeks flew by, the big question was whether the buildings would be ready. By Herculean efforts the Administration Building was completed by September, but the residence halls were not ready for occupancy. This situation was met by housing the dormitory students in one of the Pepperdine Foundation's properties, the William Penn Hotel, in downtown Los Angeles. During this period, chartered streetcars conveyed the students to and from the college each day.

Helen Mattox Young, wife of Pepperdine University's Chancellor M. Norvel Young, was one of the members of that first student body and recalls the streetcar commuting as an adventure for the students.

"We didn't mind the ride at all," she said. "And Mrs. Pepperdine also made life more interesting for us by arranging tours to various points of interest in the Los Angeles area."

Meanwhile, the summer before the opening of classes was a busy one. By July 1, Miss Marian Wright, the librarian, was struggling to index and catalog thousands of volumes. All the work of assessing, stamping, numbering, labeling and lettering was done in the basement of the old ranch mansion, which had been repaired and remodeled for the president's home.

Miss Martha P. Middlebrooks, dean of women, and J. Eddie Weems, dean of men, together with Mrs. Pepperdine, were kept busy choosing furnishings for the residence halls. The women's residence was named for George and Helen's two-year-old daughter, Marilyn. The men's residence was called Baxter Hall, to honor the first president of Pepperdine College.

Dr. Baxter expressed pleasant surprise concerning two features of George Pepperdine College. First, it was the only college he knew of where the founder had money enough to build and operate it without asking anyone for help. Secondly, the founder did not want to be president or hold any position of honor. George simply realized that his education did not qualify him to be president or a college professor. Therefore, his only objective was to get the work done and to accomplish as much good as possible with the money expended.

At last, on September 21, 1937, came the big day of dedication. More than two thousand persons attended the exercises on the campus. President Baxter acted as master of ceremonies and introduced Mayor Shaw, who extended the official welcome of the City of Los Angeles to the guests and to the infant institution of higher learning. Governor Frank Merriam made a speech congratulating the people of California upon acquiring this new Christian College and praising the founder as a man of vision and generosity.

In response to a thunderous ovation, George Pepperdine began his message of dedication with humility and poise.

He told the gathering that he felt his prayers for guidance in finding the most worthy objective for his philanthropy had been answered, and that the opening of this new Christian college marked the climax of his career; or rather the beginning of the greatest accomplishment in his life. He was then fifty-one years of age.

George also expressed his philosophy about Christian education and his words have become the philosophy of the institution he founded.

"The heart of man usually grows perverse unless trained by the influence of God's Word," he said. "If we educate a man's mind and improve his intellect with all the scientific knowledge men have discovered, and do not educate his heart by bringing it under the influence of God's Word, that man is dangerous. An educated man without Christianity is like a ship without a rudder or a powerful automobile without a steering wheel. There is no life so much worth while in this world as the Christian life because it promotes the most happiness and contentment and the greatest promise of life hereafter.

"Therefore, as my contribution to the well being and happiness of this generation and those that follow, I am endowing this institution to help young men and women prepare themselves for a life of usefulness in this competitive world and to help them build a foundation of Christian character and faith which will survive the storms of life. Young men and women in this college are to be given educational privileges equal to the best in the liberal arts, Bible training and later, we hope, in preparing for various professions. All instruction is to be under conservative, fundamental Christian supervision with the stress upon the importance of strict Christian living."

George then listed his ideals and purposes in establishing and endowing an institution of higher learning:

1. To have a four-year standard college, under whole-

some Christian influence, the work of which shall be recognized by the standard accrediting agencies of the United States.

2. To give, in addition to standard courses of the liberal arts college, special attention to Business Administration and Commercial School work, which shall prepare young men and women for important and diversified activities in the business world.

"Our college is dedicated to a two-fold objective," he said. "First, we want to provide first class, fully accredited academic training in the liberal arts, including social and natural sciences, history, languages, mathematics, music and other courses. Secondly, we are especially dedicated to a greater goal — that of building in the student a Christ-like life, a love for the church and a passion for the souls of mankind.

"We want to build in the student, Christian character and a desire to prepare for Christian service, Christian living and Christian influence in the world," he added. "We believe that all should acknowledge the total sovereignty of God and submit our lives fully to His will in faith and action, which encompasses the complete duty of man and is full proof of our acceptable stewardship."

Mr. Pepperdine stipulated in his speech that faculty and the Board of Trustees would be composed of devout Christians; men and women who would give careful attention to safeguarding and deepening the faith of students, increasing their loyalty to God and their zeal for saving souls.

"This institution," he said, "while placing special emphasis on Christian living and fundamental Christian faith, shall be a private enterprise, not connected with any church and shall not solicit contributions from the churches."

He noted, however, that gifts from individual members of the churches "are gratefully accepted."

He also promised that aggressive and systematic efforts would be made to help students secure part-time work to assist those who were unable to pay all their college expenses.

"Worthy young people with very little money, but with a burning desire to get an education and make good, shall receive special consideration." he added.

On the day following the dedication ceremonies, student registration was begun. One hundred and sixty-seven students from twenty-two states and two foreign countries enrolled. There was a faculty of twenty-one teachers representing eight departments.

In 1937 the heads of departments were President Baxter, professor of Bible; Hugh M. Tiner, professor of education; Callie Mae Coons, professor of home economics; R. R. Coons, professor of science; Edward C. Petty, professor of business administration; C. P. Roland, professor of mathematics; Wade Rudy, professor of English; and Jay L. Thompson, professor of social science. Besides the departmental offerings, courses were scheduled in foreign languages, speech arts, music, physical education and art.

In spite of the rapidity with which the college had been organized and the handicap under which it operated in terms of incomplete buildings and newness, its administration, faculty and students worked with amazing smoothness, cheerfulness and whole hearted cooperation. The members of the faculty and the student body, aware that they were building traditions for the future, approached the many problems of organization with amazing care and wisdom.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Guided by Dedicated Men

Pepperdine College's first year was a busy and significant one. After the initial two weeks of commuting to the campus by streetcar the dormitories were ready for occupancy and the fledgling school became a resident college.

O. M. (Wally) Simpson, now a school teacher in Cambria, California, and an elder in the Morro Bay Church of Christ, was a member of that first student body.

"I was sure glad when we moved to the campus," he remembers, "because I wasn't exactly sure who was paying the bill for staying in that hotel. And I only had twenty-seven dollars when I got out here from Texas. Of course, I found out later that the hotel was just part of our tuition and room and board, which wasn't much in those days."

With the physical facilities far enough along for school to open, President Baxter and Dean Tiner began to concentrate on academic growth. They worked diligently to secure accreditation of the new institution from the Northwest Association of Colleges. These efforts were rewarded when the college received official accreditation on April 5, 1938. Such recognition of the college as a standard four-year institution of higher learning within seven months of its beginning was unique and was a signal achievement for the administration and faculty.

In June of 1938 an historic ceremony was conducted — Pepperdine College's first commencement. This important milestone was held in honor of four graduates who had transferred to Pepperdine after three years of college work elsewhere. These first four graduates of the new college were Carmen Landrum of Tompkinsville, Kentucky; Paul Tucker of Bon Aqua, Tennessee; Malcolm Hinckley of San Gabriel, California, and Richard Gibson of Washington, D.C. The wide area of the United States from which the graduates came was characteristic of the remainder of the student body.

The new college demanded a great deal of George Pepperdine's attention from the beginning. Many plans for expansion and an active building program were under way, however, George was unable to devote himself full-time to the college. He was then still president of Western Auto and his business also made heavy demands on his time. Moreover, he was actively engaged in other philanthropic work, although this was reduced in later years.

Working with George and the administration was a dedicated group of men who served as the Board of Trustees. Clarence (Tuck) Shattuck, who served from the beginning until his retirement in 1975, was one of the members. Shattuck, who worked many years as an executive for the National Cash Register Company and later as a business consultant, was also a member of the Pepperdine Foundation from the start. Other members of the founding board were George Pepperdine, Hugh Tiner, A. J. Dumm and a young banker by the name of Donald V. Miller, still serving. Later Helen Pepperdine was added to the Board and still serves in that capacity. M. S. Rucker of Long Beach was also one of the earlier trustees, now deceased.

George Pepperdine served as chairman of the board of the college he founded until he reached the age of 70.

At that time he asked Donald Miller to take over as chairman.

Don Miller, a native of Los Angeles, whose parents were actively involved in the Restoration Movement, met George Pepperdine casually when he started attending services of the Central Church of Christ as a young man. "I just knew him as the owner of Western Auto," said Miller, "and I was impressed, of course, to even know such a person slightly. I remember one time when that acquaintance really shook me up. It happened one Sunday when I was preaching at Vista, down near San Diego. I hadn't done much preaching so I was a little uneasy up there in the pulpit anyway. Then, just as I got started, George and Helen Pepperdine walked into the service and I nearly died," he said. "I lost my train of thought and it took a while to regain it."

Something about the young banker must have impressed George Pepperdine, for when he began to organize the Board of Pepperdine College, Don Miller was one of the first men he approached.

"One day, out of the blue, I received this letter from Mr. Pepperdine asking me to come to a meeting downtown," Don recalls. "That was the first formal knowledge I had that he and Hugh had been talking about starting a college."

During an interview in his home in Fallbrook, California, where Don Miller retired a few years ago from a vice presidency of the United California Bank, he mused about George Pepperdine.

"All of us were impressed with the humility and Christian spirit of this man," Don said. "Yet he had a tremendous drive and a sense of mission in establishing this school. The fact that he was able to establish it — able to succeed in business as he did and then have the courage to give it all up at the age of fifty to build the college — was evidence

of George's own growth in faith from his boyhood. Here was a man who was generous to a fault, yet it was in-incongruous how he, as chairman of the board of the college, pinched pennies, and this was the same man who later went out and put three-quarters of a million dollars into worthless desert property. This, plus some other unwise investments, caused him to lose all that he had left of his fortune. And when he had nothing left, he was still the same trusting, Christian gentleman. He reminded me of Paul; he knew how to deal with adversity."

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Dealing with Adversity

George Pepperdine's life, up to the beginning of Pepperdine College, had been one of cumulative victory — victory over poverty and over a weak body and serious illness. To be sure, he had suffered his share of severe reverses, heavy losses, heartaches and betrayal by false friends and financial advisors.

Throughout it all, he never failed to turn to God with whatever in life faced him. In God he found solace in adversity; to God he gave thanks for all things; his faith was his life and he lived to the fullest throughout his life.

Aside from his religion and his family, the college he founded became his principal interest, especially after he sold Western Auto, and the college lived up to his expectations. It grew in size and it gained academically. It began to field good athletic teams and from the outset became a force in college basketball, track, tennis and baseball. George was a frequent visitor to games and events on the campus.

Profoundly interested in everything about the school, he loved especially to go to chapel to hear the young voices raised in song and prayer and devotion to God. He enjoyed dropping in on classes in session and visiting the administrators and faculty and students. It was a common sight

to see the tall, lean founder strolling along the Promenade or through a classroom building or hallway in animated conversation with a group of students. He was vitally concerned about students — interested in their backgrounds, their problems, their likes and dislikes, and their hopes for the future.

"Pepperdine College was like a big family," Wally Simpson recalls of those early years. "Mr. and Mrs. Pepperdine were there often and I remember one Christmas when they took a group of us to their home because we couldn't go home for the holidays." For many years, this was a tradition in the Pepperdine home, often entertaining sixty to a hundred people at dinner on Christmas Day.

Hugh Tiner, who replaced Dr. Baxter as president in 1940 when the latter returned to his duties at David Lipscomb after helping Pepperdine get started, remembers that, even personally, Mr. Pepperdine helped students get jobs in order to work their way through college.

"I knew of students who worked for the YMCA to help pay their expenses," Hugh said, "and Mr. Pepperdine would help the Y pay their salaries. He would tell students that all they needed to come to Pepperdine was a sincere desire to get a college education, and many who came had no more than that. A good example is Kenny Hahn."

Dr. Tiner went on to tell how this young neighborhood student came to his office one day and told the president he wanted to go to college but had no money and that he couldn't expect financial help from his widowed mother of seven sons.

"Would you be willing to rake leaves?" President Tiner asked him.

"I sure would," Kenny said. "I'd be willing to work at anything."

He raked leaves for 25 cents an hour. He cleaned restrooms and the gym and classrooms and did other odd

jobs. When he wasn't working on campus he was working in his oldest brother's service station.

"That was exactly in harmony with Brother Pepperdine's ideals," Dr. Tiner told this biographer.

Kenneth Hahn finished Pepperdine to go into a career of service as an officer in the Navy in World War II, a history teacher for a time at his Alma Mater and then into a brilliant political career as the youngest councilman in the history of Los Angeles; then to being the youngest Los Angeles County Supervisor. Today he is the senior member of that prestigious governing body. In his first political role, Kenny Hahn enlisted the help of students to go from door to door in the college area in support of his becoming an elected councilman.

Another "typical" student of those early years, and one who became a close friend of the founder and his wife and a staunch supporter of the college, was William L. Allen II. He transferred to Pepperdine from Freed Hardeman College in Tennessee on a basketball scholarship.

"Doc," as he was affectionately called in those days, went on from Pepperdine to study medicine at the University of Louisville. He then returned to Los Angeles to set up a successful private practice and to serve even now as the school's physician. His children — Bill, Judy, and Carolyn — are Pepperdine alumni, and his wife, Thelma, has long been active in the Associated Women for Pepperdine. At this writing, she is state president of this unique support group.

Many other alumni — such as Walter King, Bill Stivers, Carl Mitchell, Helen Young, Ken Ross, Ken Davidson and many others — have returned over the years to serve their Alma Mater in important ways.

"Mr. Pepperdine's fondest memories in his last days," said Dr. William Stivers, head of the department of languages at Pepperdine's Malibu campus, "were those of his

hours spent with students and other members of the college family."

Hugh Tiner remembers: "We could expect him for chapel almost any day. He brought interesting people out to visit the college and he always brought them to chapel if they were there at that time of day. He brought the mayor and senators and others who gave inspiring talks after chapel services. He went out of his way to find people with a message to bring to students."

Dr. Tiner paused thoughtfully and added: "He was living through those students the things he had missed in his own youth."

When his greatest "trial by fire" struck, it was George's faith in God and the comfort of knowing that this close-knit academic institution escaped financial ruin in his own disaster that enabled him to endure it all.

George's financial difficulties centered in the Pepperdine Foundation and its operation, which in a large way encompassed his activities from the time of his sale of Western Auto Supply Company in 1939 to the dissolution of the Foundation in 1951. As mentioned previously, the Foundation had been established in 1931 and George contributed very heavily to it throughout the years. Between 1931 and 1937 the Foundation contributed to various churches and charitable institutions, then when the college was established, George decided to use the Foundation to build a large endowment fund for the College. The Foundation could handle various types of investments in diversified businesses such as mines, oil wells, factories, chemical plants, real estate, etc., which the college could not handle.

George gave the College large gifts of his Western Auto stock in 1937 and afterwards. The financial needs of the College were heavy during this period because of the construction and expansion program which was carried out during the first few years of its existence. The first

building added to the original four was a gymnasium, erected in the fall of 1938 at a cost of $40,000. During 1938-39 the library building was completed. It was a fine concrete structure capable of housing thirty-five thousand volumes and later was enlarged. During the summer of 1939 two additional dormitories were built, doubling the capacity for resident students. These structures cost $70,000 and brought the total investment in the college plant to $673,000. Then later the auditorium and fine arts building were added at a cost of $160,000. Other buildings followed, some added several years after the founder's death such as the Seaver Learning Center, donated by Mrs. Frank Roger Seaver.

Additional money was provided for the college in 1939, when George sold his controlling interest in Western Auto stores in the eleven western states. Before this sale was made, a large portion of the stock was donated to the college so that the proceeds of the sale could come to it directly without any tax. The grand total of all cash and stocks donated to the college by George and the Foundation amounted to about three million dollars. This represented about one million for college endowment and the remainder for buildings and equipment, which, of course, would be worth many times that amount today.

Among the assets of the Foundation were more than a million dollars, invested in real estate. Most of this sum represented equity in apartment buildings. George and his associates had purchased for income purposes, twelve very fine residential and hotel apartments in the Hollywood-Wilshire district.

These units, among them the famous Ravenswood, the Lido, the Asbury and the President, attracted the sort of clients who demanded a great deal of service. To maintain a large staff and operate the buildings cut into the returns very heavily. To the disappointment of the

Foundation administration, only a few of the houses made a reasonable profit, while one or two of them operated continuously at a loss during the depression. During 1938-40 not everyone could afford to pay the rental rates. Some of the bachelor or single apartments in a few of the houses rented for as little as $35 a month, but the average was much higher; some suites in the Ravenwood, for instance, rented for $350 a month. Consequently, there was always the problem of vacancies, which took no account of expensive staffs.

With the outbreak of the war in Europe in 1939 and the resulting acceleration of war goods production in Los Angeles in 1940-41, the vacancies gradually started to fill up. George and his associates drew a breath of relief, but soon apartment rents were frozen and their hopes faded as wages, utilities, services and taxes continued to rise and cut into income.

Under the stimulation of war, industries began to boom and the opportunities to invest in various enterprises were most alluring. For a while the officials of the Foundation struggled with the question of whether to hold onto the apartments or to sell. The college building expansion program was using money far faster than it was coming in. Unable to foresee the fantastic rise in real estate values and not wishing to carry indefinitely the almost dead weight of the investment, George finally decided in 1942 to sell the apartment houses and felt fortunate to find buyers for them at a small sacrifice.

Gradually Foundation funds were placed in various kinds of industries. Eventually the Foundation held investments in more than twenty firms. The amount invested varied with each company and was quite wide in representation, for the businesses ranged from aircraft equipment producers to chemicals and included transportation, tool makers, tire manufacturers and paint companies. In

a few projects, heavy investments had been made in what gave promise of very rich returns. George was, therefore, naturally reluctant to lose the initial investment, especially when it appeared that by investing an additional sum the particular production problem could be solved or a business put on its feet. These additional demands soon amounted to far more than the Foundation could supply. When additional capital could not be supplied, great losses occurred.

When the Foundation's and George's private assets could not supply the needs, the Foundation, with George's endorsement, borrowed large sums to carry on some of the business projects which promised big returns "just around the corner." However, the right "corner" failed to materialize on too many of the projects, and eventually George and the Foundation, in 1951, found themselves unable to pay all the notes for money borrowed.

For a few years after the 1951 climax George suffered many indignities, insults and rough treatment in going through the ordeal of dissolution of the Foundation, defending numerous law suits brought by creditors whom he would like to have paid. They all had to take their share of the distribution of assets which were slowly turned into cash by men who were approved by the court to handle the dissolution. Some speculative assets that were disposed of abruptly, without waiting for their expected development, brought, in many cases, only a fraction of their potential value. In the final settlement the creditors failed to get all that was due them.

George's deepest regret of his business life was the unfortunate outcome of those ill-advised investments in projects where he did not have practical experience, but depended upon men whom he thought could be trusted. These men were badly mistaken about their assurances of success and the wisdom of the undertakings. It was painful and distressing to George, not only to owe people

money he could not pay, but to realize that the assets which he placed in the Foundation for the purpose of building a large endowment for the college had been swept away.

However, such losses did not ruin his serene and trustful spirit, dull his enjoyment of the good work being continued, nor rob him of his optimism and happiness or his faith in God and men. George was grateful that his original gifts to the college were safe and had grown in value and that an untold amount of good work continued to be done daily for more than a thousand young people at that time. George was also happy that he had previously made financial provisions for his wife and children — enough to provide for their daily needs.

The ordeal through which George passed from 1951 to 1957 was very trying and would have wrecked men of less stalwart faith. But he emerged with stronger and brighter faith than ever. Although advancing age and general bodily weakness slowed him down noticeably, he developed none of the physical ailments usually attributed to such pressures as he had undergone. His attitude was somewhat like that of Job of old, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh way; blessed be the name of the Lord." In this case, however, George believed the Lord did not actually take away his wealth, but that "He allowed me to be naive and credulous enough to fall for some very unwise and speculative investments which gave glowing promises of great success, but which sorely disappointed me."

George's strong optimism was never quenched as long as he lived. Had he not been extremely adventurous, blind to the possibilities of failure, and willing to take a long chance against heavy odds, he never would have started the Western Auto Supply Company in 1909 on "$5 and an Idea," using for his working capital only the credit which his enthusiasm and optimism could persuade people

to extend to him. And, while he freely admitted that his extreme optimism in the early years was in many cases unsound, the fact that he won out on more than fifty per cent of the plunges he made in developing the auto supply business from a shoe-string start, those ventures had to classify his activities as brilliant strokes of genius. However, he used to joke in later years about his long shot risks of the past. His uncontrolled optimism all through the years was on many occasions "like the skinny man without hips who thought it unnecessary to wear either a belt or suspenders," as expressed by him.

Accumulating years and lack of capital for investment purposes prevented George Pepperdine from attempting any further business ventures, so he enjoyed reminiscences, reflecting and meditating on happenings of long ago and enjoying the activities and growth of the college he founded.

His faith never dimmed. Perhaps a passage in a soiled and worn old Bible he carried in his grip while traveling among his stores tells why. There are many pencil marks on favorite passages in the Old and New Testaments in this old Book. One he had marked was I Timothy 6:17-19, which reads: "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; . . . that they be rich in good works, . . . laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Ready for Whatever Awaits

A crowd of some 12,000 people nearly filled the Los Angeles Sports Arena for the Pepperdine College Spring Bible Lectureship in March of 1962. The hum of their voices filled the big auditorium as they visited while waiting for the program to begin.

Suddenly a hush came over the crowd as a long, sleek, red and white ambulance entered through one of the west doors and eased onto the basketball court. An attendant and the driver went to the rear of the vehicle and wheeled out a stretcher with a white-haired figure on it. The man on the wheeled stretcher waved to the crowd, which rose to its feet in a spontaneous ovation at the surprise visit.

"I'm happy to present to you George Pepperdine," Pepperdine College Vice President William Teague said simply and handed the microphone to the invalid.

Then for a few moments George Pepperdine, his voice slightly quavering, spoke of his joy at being there among his Church of Christ brethren. "Perhaps for the last time," he concluded.

The crowd again rose to its feet in deep respect as the tired, ill and yet remarkably alert George Pepperdine stayed in the background on the "dolly" while he listened to the program, George II and Helen with him. It was his last

time to attend the Spring Bible Lectureship he loved so much.

It was nearing the end of a painful — yet strangely beautiful — three-year vigil for Helen Pepperdine and they both knew it. She knew, too, that the strain of taking him to something like the lectureship was more than his strength permitted, but, she reasoned, he wanted to go so desperately that the good it would do him emotionally and spiritually was worth the risk to his physical condition.

George Pepperdine was bedridden when he reached his 76th birthday on June 20, 1962. His health had started to break in 1959. Helen recalls the first time a symptom that something was drastically wrong with him physically, expressed itself.

"He started out of the driveway one morning to go to a Pendleton Tool Company meeting. He was on the board of Morris Pendleton's company. Suddenly he doubled over in pain from his abdomen and chest." Helen said. "We had him checked for a possible heart attack but it wasn't that. He went through other rigorous examinations and it was discovered that he had an aneurysm of the aorta, the large artery leading out of the heart."

An arterial by-pass was suggested, but after a series of examinations and consultations with several doctors it was discovered that such surgery would be too dangerous.

These and other ailments demanded a strict diet and doctors warned him not to drive, lift anything heavy or do anything that required exertion or excitement and that any strain, shock, bump or fall might be fatal.

George Pepperdine was fully aware of all this. He faced whatever future he had left just as anyone would have expected him to react — without fear, but he did slow down. Before he became bedfast the last year of his life he stayed as active as he could within the bounds of doctors' orders. He went to church services regularly and visited

the college frequently. Visitors came often — from the church and the school — and he enjoyed sitting and reminiscing with them about mission work and happenings at the college and current events.

He stopped driving his car after his various serious ailments were diagnosed. Soon the pain in his side made walking uncomfortable and Helen ordered a wheelchair. He continued to go to church services in the chair, as long as he could, his therapist carrying him downstairs. Helen had a hospital bed put in his room the last year so he would be more comfortable, and so that she could more easily care for him and give him a better view out the windows. Helen learned to lift her husband out of bed and into the wheel chair by using a sling over her shoulder and under his hips.

Dr. Allen recommended physical therapy. He suggested Herb Daykin, a Pepperdine alumnus, who began to come to the house on Wellington Road four days a week to use therapy and to exercise Mr. Pepperdine's legs and arms.

Despite his illness and pain, George was happy in those last years. It took little to make him happy. He loved visitors and many came. During the last few months a group of Pepperdine alumni took turns sitting up half of the night with him so Helen could get some early rest.

"Children from the church used to come over on Sunday afternoons to sing songs for George," Helen remembers. "This pleased him so much and did him so much good spiritually. I know it sounds like a cliche, but his sole purpose in life was to glorify God in everything that he did. So anything that had to do with the church made him happy."

One day during the last Christmas season George lived on this earth, he asked Walter King to drive him over to Pepperdine College in his old Packard. He just wanted to take a ride in his old car and to see the college's new

administration headquarters — a large building on Vermont and 81st which had been purchased and renovated.

"We took him over there and wheeled him all over the building," Walter remembers. "And when he saw it he wept. It was the first time I ever saw a tear in his eyes. And he said he only wished that he could live longer and had more money so that he could help the school develop its full potential.

"He was like that," Walter added. "His only concern for money was what he could do with it, to help others. He didn't care a thing about spending money on himself. I can remember his saying, 'after all, a man can only wear one suit at a time; so why buy more than two?' "

Walter King, who was one of the team of men who sat with George during his last days, said he was always impressed with Mr. Pepperdine's mind and memory.

"He was alert right up to the end," said Walter. "He remembered people who owed him large sums of money; not only that, he remembered their phone numbers and addresses, and he would ask me to call and try to collect it for Mrs. Pepperdine and the college.

"I used to sit with him on Monday nights," Walter went on. "After the house would quiet down he liked to talk about his life. One night he was talking about the twenty-two major apartment buildings the Foundation once owned. One time a friend told him about a good buy in an apartment complex and he paid a deposit on it. Later another friend told him the place had been used as a house of prostitution. He cancelled the deal immediately and lost the $5,000.00 deposit."

Kenneth Davidson was another Pepperdiner — an insurance executive — who sat with Mr. Pepperdine during his last days.

"Often he had a lot of pain," Kenny remembers, "and he'd just lie there enduring it with his eyes closed. But

other times, when he felt better, he would talk. He talked about current events and Los Angeles and this country which he loved so much. He was always keenly interested in everything going on in the world and he kept up on the daily news. I asked him one day, if he could go anywhere in the world, where would he go. He thought about it a minute and then he said he thought he would go to Australia because there were a lot of opportunities down there."

George worked with his biographers during those last three years and lived to see the publication of Faith is My Fortune. In the book he concluded with a personal message in which he told of the physical ailments bothering him and how the doctors had warned that these could take his life at any time, to which he responded typically:

"Such instructions make a fellow quiet down quickly and think soberly and take it easy. It is not frightening, as some might think, to look over the brink into the unknown, knowing that you may live ten years or only ten minutes. It is rather a time for calm reflection, meditation and thankfulness for the blessings of the long life which I have been permitted to live. It is the time to cherish the bright hope of a glorious reunion with loved ones who have gone before. I may never be physically strong again, but I think my spirit is as buoyant and hopeful as ever, and my outlook is still optimistic. I am ready any moment for whatever may await me, in the Providence of God."

On the Friday before his death, Helen learned how close doctors felt his "moment for whatever awaits me" really was. George had been telephoning several days trying to locate some special tires for his old 1939 Packard and finally located a set.

"I'd like to go down and have them put on," he told Helen.

He kept bringing it up and finally Helen called the

doctor. He told her gently that he believed the end was near.

"He's surely determined to go down and see about those tires," Helen said.

"It might cause a rupture," the doctor cautioned. "Take it as easily as you can."

Helen called Herb Daykin, his therapist, and they carefully carried George to the car. At the tire place they drove him in and he selected the tires he wanted. On the way home he became ill and hemorrhaged. They quickly put him back in bed and soon he felt better and seemed no worse for having made the trip.

On Sunday a group came from the church and sang hymns and conducted worship services. As usual, George thoroughly enjoyed the worship. Helen had called Norvel Young earlier and asked him to bring the communion emblems. "It may be the last time," she told Norvel on the phone.

On Monday George was alternately alert and drowsy. Helen, as was customary, read to him from U.S. News & World Report, a weekly habit. George Jr., who had already been told by his mother that his father's condition was critical, came by and the two men had a nice long visit.

The Pepperdine Board of Trustees meeting was scheduled for Tuesday but the man who founded the college peacefully slipped away before the meeting convened. Helen allowed the meeting to proceed — the other trustees unaware the founder had passed away.

"What a beautiful example he was even in death," said Walter King, who was with him. "He had often talked to me of his death. He had said earlier that this was his last day. But the wonderful thing was that he was ready to go when God was ready to take him. This was death but he was not afraid and he left this life in the most relaxed way I have ever seen."

Los Angeles County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn got in

his car at the Hall of Administration to go home for the day. He switched on the radio to catch the five o'clock news.

"The founder of George Pepperdine College is dead," was the lead news story Pepperdine Alumnus Kenny Hahn heard.

"Walter and Anne King came over and brought some Colonel Sanders chicken and we sat around and nibbled on that," Helen remembers.

Funeral services were conducted in the college auditorium, with President Young, William Teague and Dean J. P. Sanders speaking; and Roy Osborne came from San Leandro to participate at the service. Burial was in Inglewood Cemetery.

After the funeral, Helen and her children went out to dinner and then drove down to the Laguna Art Festival for which George II had season tickets.

"We had to get away from everybody for a while," said this amazing woman who had worked so hard for three and a half years to prolong her husband's life.

Those closest to the situation firmly believe that George Pepperdine would not have been given that much time without her faith and endurance.